the Tip of an Iceberg

Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry



C. Raymond Holmes, D. Min.

Comments on *The Tip of an Iceberg*

"Dr. Holmes is forthright but extremely fair. His reasoning is incisive but wholesomely positive. I promise you, there will be no waste of your valuable time thinking through this monumental work from cover to cover." —**George E. Vandeman**, *It Is Written*

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"Every thoughtful student of the Bible who values its divinely inspired authority will want to read *The Tip of an Iceberg*. While Dr. Holmes insists on the correct interpretation of all the Scripture references relating to the issue, he emphatically affirms the Scriptural imperative for the role of women in ministry." —**Rosalie Haffner Lee**, hospital chaplain and author

"Dr. Ray Holmes has written a book that is a masterpiece. It is both fair and convincing. I urge every Adventist to read it. His appeal to the church and its leaders to stand true to the plain statements of Scripture as the basis for all of its beliefs and practices is one which we do well to heed." —**Francis Wernick**, former General Conference Vice-President

"*The Tip of an Iceberg* is provocative but not offensive, affirmative but not arrogant. I recommend the reading of this book for all Seventh-day Adventist Christians who wish to be alert to the changing trends of spiritual thought and are determined to base their doctrinal beliefs and lifestyle on the authority of the Holy Scriptures." —**Merle L. Mills**, former General Conference Vice-President



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C. Raymond Holmes, D. Min.

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On the Cover: The tip of this North Atlantic iceberg dwarfs the 180-foot-long vessel next to it.

Photograph Copyright © James R. Holland.

Dedicated to my wife

Shirley

without whose support

and encouragement

this book would not

have been written

"Strength and dignity are her clothing,

and she smiles at the future."

Proverbs 31:25, NASB

THE TIP OF AN ICEBERG

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FOREWORD

by

Leslie Hardinge

It has been a long time since I read a book as refreshingly loyal to the Scriptures as is Raymond Holmes's *The Tip of an Iceberg*. To all who accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God this study is a breath of fresh air. Its lucid style and cogent arguments cut to the core of so much cant in exegesis today. While those with their own agenda are seeking rationalizations to avoid the implications of Scripture even as they vigorously claim to support them, this book plows a straight course. It accepts the implications of the divine authority of Scripture and seeks in them the inspired bases for the solution of our problems.

Holmes claims that the issue of women's ordination stands or falls on the authority of the Bible. His implied question on every page is, "What saith the Lord?" If God has spoken, we must accept His word whatever the consequences to our own pet schemes. From creation Jehovah set up male leadership and female subordination, both in the family and in society. Holmes stresses that this is His chosen model both before and after the fall. Since He chose a male anointed priesthood to lead worship in the Old Testament and a male ordained ministry for His church in the New, the matter of women's ordination should be settled. For Holmes it is. He points out, however, that this inspired directive does not in any way preclude women's ministry in the church to their fullest potential. The New Testament, and Paul in particular, encourage women to participate in many phases of service. He argues that in the New Testament the ordained pastorate is not permitted to women.

Holmes carefully considers all the Pauline statements which bear on ordination for women. These passages are the bone of

contention in the Christian women's movement today. Since they are inspired rubrics in easily understandable language, they should be accepted as they read. He points out that to regard them as culturally conditioned or merely Paul's personal opinion, and consequently vulnerable in today's climate, eviscerates the entire doctrine of Biblical inspiration and opens the dike to later problems. To change or reject them defies the divine authority of the Bible.

Holmes also maintains that the survival of the Seventh-day Adventist church as the force it has been in the world depends on what it does about the ordination of women. He comes to this conclusion because of his experience in the Lutheran church prior to becoming a Seventh-day Adventist and by observing what has happened in other Protestant bodies. The central issue for each has been the authority of Scripture. When that has been compromised, the way was opened not only for ordination for women, but for other actions contrary to Scripture, even in some cases to allowing practicing homosexuals to serve as ministers. In the Swedish Lutheran church, ordination for women seems itself to have been the means by which the compromise of biblical authority was introduced. From whatever direction the compromise has come, it has proven devastating to the faith and practice of the affected churches.

Holmes's sobering question to Seventh-day Adventists is this: When for all the reasons being presented today, "Thus saith the Lord" is once brushed aside so that we may accept this demand of the women's movement, is there anything to prevent any other non-biblical teaching from entering the church? The Sabbath, tithing, foot washing and other scriptural doctrines now vital parts of the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists will be exposed to the same kind of arguments of limited inspiration, cultural conditioning, social justice, women's equality, and affirmative action by which women's ordination is decided. Holmes's basic point is that the authority of the Scriptures must never be eroded. Seventh-day Adventism must stand firm on the biblical foundations, as it has done from the beginning, and not bend to the gales of rationalization spawned by the women's or gay movements. This kind of straightforward book has long been overdue.

INTRODUCTION

An Impending Danger

Ellen G. White tells a fascinating story illustrating spiritual truth:

> Shortly before I sent out the testimonies regarding the efforts of the enemy to undermine the foundation of our faith through the dissemination of seductive theories, I had read an incident about a ship in a fog meeting an iceberg. For several nights I slept but little. I seemed to be bowed down as a cart beneath sheaves. One night a scene was clearly presented before me. A vessel was upon the waters, in a heavy fog. Suddenly the lookout cried, "Iceberg just ahead!" There, towering high above the ship, was a gigantic iceberg. An authoritative voice cried out, "Meet it!" There was not a moment's hesitation. It was a time for instant action. The engineer put on full steam, and the man at the wheel steered the ship straight into the iceberg. With a crash she struck the ice. There was a fearful shock, and the iceberg broke into many pieces, falling with a noise like thunder to the deck. The passengers were violently shaken by the force of the collision, but no lives were lost. The vessel was injured, but not beyond repair. She rebounded from the contact, trembling from stem to stern, like a living creature. Then she moved forward on her way.
>
> Well I knew the meaning of this representation. I had my orders. I had heard the words, like a voice from our Captain, "Meet it!" I knew what my duty was, and that there was not a moment to lose. The time for decided action had come. I must without delay obey the command, "Meet it!"
>
> That night I was up at one o'clock, writing as fast as my hand could pass over the paper. For the next few days I worked early and late, preparing for our people the instruction given me regarding the errors that were coming in among us.

> I have been hoping that there would be a thorough reformation, and that the principles for which we fought in the early days, and which were brought out in the power of the Holy Spirit, would be maintained.[1]

The ship represented the Seventh-day Adventist movement, whose very existence was threatened by a large "iceberg"—the introduction of speculative theories about the nature and personality of God. Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's book *The Living Temple* set forth pantheistic views that were already receiving prominent play in the church from ministers and medical workers. The concept that God was in everything—the trees, the air, the food, the animals, and every person—seemed to make Him very real and very close.

Such ideas sounded attractive and plausible, and most people did not see their danger: by making everywhere and everything God's dwelling place, these concepts tended not only to rob God of real personality (making Him little more than a diffuse, all-pervading force), but they undermined crucial Bible doctrines that Seventh-day Adventists were to teach, such as the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Even the book title, *The Living Temple*, hints that the real sanctuary is not above but is each person. The logical consequence of such views is to regard one's own sinful impulses as the promptings of God, who dwells within His human "temple." Far from directing attention to Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary above, where the sacred law is enshrined, the pantheistic teachings would direct the attention inward, and man would quickly become a law unto himself. Such teaching would destroy Seventh-day Adventism as surely as an iceberg can destroy a ship.

No wonder Mrs. White received the instruction, "Meet it!"

Large icebergs can weigh more than one million tons and tower above the sea to heights of 400 feet. They are extremely dangerous for ships traveling in northern waters. The greatest danger, however, resides not in the portion that can be seen above the surface but in that which lies beneath. Only from one-eighth to one-tenth of an iceberg's total mass is above water.

The great ship Titanic, on its maiden voyage, struck the underwater portion of a big iceberg in the darkness of April 14,

1912, and sank in two and one-half hours. The collision, almost imperceptible to the passengers, tore a 300-foot gash in the hull of that "unsinkable" vessel. The bitter cold water poured in and no one could stop it. Down she went, breaking apart, until she hit the ocean floor. Out of 2,200 passengers, 1,517 died.

A warning had come to the officers on duty just before the iceberg sliced its way down the side of the great ship, opening it up like a tin can. But it was too late. They knew they were sailing in treacherous waters, but their confidence in the Titanic's indestructibility blinded them to the danger.

As the sinking of the Titanic illustrates, greater damage can be done to the message and mission of the church by the submerged elements of an issue, which in this case is the question of biblical authority and interpretation, than by the surface elements alone.

Does such an iceberg threaten the Seventh-day Adventist church today? Do we have issues breaking the surface of the waters on which we sail whose underlying elements could irreparably damage the church as surely as Dr. Kellogg's pantheism could? If we recognize such an issue, we must obey the instructions of our Captain and *meet it!*

The most fundamental doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists is the one we list first, "The Holy Scriptures":

> The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.[2]

Yet the question baffling many church members, contributing to considerable uncertainty, is: How is it possible for students of the same Bible to arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions? This book is an attempt to uncover some of the reasons why such

radically divergent conclusions are reached. In the process, we may discover an iceberg lurking in the theological waters, with its submerged elements the most dangerous.

Women's Ordination: A Test Case

The Seventh-day Adventist church continues to face the crucial issue of whether or not to ordain women in ministry. It is crucial because what the church finally decides will reveal a great deal about the nature of its commitment to biblical authority and its approach to the interpretation of Scripture. In spite of the decision of the 1990 Indianapolis session of the General Conference not to ordain women, the issue remains unresolved. Hardly anyone is of the opinion that proponents will let the matter rest and accept that decision as final. Many insist that the ordination of women in ministry is inevitable, that it is only a matter of time, that the contemporary cultural pressure is too great for the church to withstand. But there are many more who are convinced that it is not inevitable, based on their confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist church's historic commitment to biblical authority.

Ellen G. White wrote:

> God means that truth shall be brought to the front and become the subject of examination and discussion, even through the contempt placed upon it. The minds of the people must be agitated; every controversy, every reproach, every effort to restrict liberty of conscience, is God's means of awakening minds that otherwise might slumber.[3]

Powerful intimidation factors operate against those who critique the movement for the ordination of women in ministry. Such critique is viewed as unkind, discriminatory, divisive, and even unchristian. Some in influential positions do not hesitate to try to muzzle the critics. But do we dare sacrifice biblical truth for the sake of superficial peace? Shall silence be imposed on those who, based upon their study of Scripture, do not agree with a proposed

practice? Is it in the interest of justice and biblical faith to brand such students of the Bible as unloving and unfair? Accusations like this only intimidate into silence those who would otherwise speak. No one wants to be thought unfair or unloving.

It is not unkind or unloving to examine practice in the light of the Bible. On the contrary, the church is morally obligated to examine any practice that is proposed and to condemn it if it is contrary to biblical teaching. Love is always bound up with truth. If it is not so bound, it becomes nothing more than sentimentalism. We must always remember that neither human experience nor human claims are the tests of biblical truth. Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak "the truth in love." What follows in this book is an attempt to do so. Some of my brothers and sisters in the faith, among whom are close personal friends, will not agree with the conclusions I have reached, though many others do. However, a higher principle than friendship must always be allowed to operate within the fellowship of believers: the Bible is the revelation from God against which we must test all teaching and all practice in the life of our beloved church. That, more than anything else, is what this book is all about. Christians must never fear to turn the spotlight of God's Word on anything that appears attractive or appealing.

It is not necessary that Seventh-day Adventists agree on every jot and tittle. Nor are they expected to follow any one person's, or one group's, opinion or position. Seventh-day Adventists are thinking people, however, and they deserve to know and understand issues their church faces. When believers, based on sincere study of the Bible, are of the opinion that a proposed practice cannot be sustained by the Bible, they are bound by conscience to say so.

The Primary Focus of This Book

Based on scholarly studies, this book is more of an exposé than a treatise. It is designed to alert thinking constituents of the Seventh-day Adventist church to the crucial issue of biblical authority and interpretation that underlies the question of the role of women in ministry.

The primary issue always confronting the church at large, and the Seventh-day Adventist church in particular, is that of biblical

authority and interpretation. Comments by Adventist constituents following a symposium on women in ministry indicate that many are not fully aware of the crucial relationship between biblical authority, biblical interpretation, and the role of women in ministry. One pastor observed that he did not have a conviction regarding this matter until recently. "Now," he wrote to me, "I can see that the real issue is the authority of Scripture." The major reason for this progression in his thinking was exposure to materials produced over the past few years that have helped him become aware of the underlying issue. That pastor is representative of those who have been similarly alerted to the "real issue," the submerged and most dangerous part of an iceberg.

Therefore, the primary focus of this book is on the authority of the Bible and the manner of its interpretation; it will attempt to show the difference between full authority and limited authority of the Bible as applied to the contemporary question of women's ordination. The issue of biblical authority in relation to this question is sufficiently crucial for the church to warrant a full and complete discussion—a discussion in which attention is called to the fact that there is a way of understanding the women's ordination issue that is not motivated by male chauvinism, but by a concern that the church be guided by Scripture.

In this endeavor I am encouraged by the fact that, by and large, the constituents of the Seventh-day Adventist church are committed to the Bible, and by the fact that the position I represent is the majority view in North America as well as throughout the world church.

The book is divided into three sections. Chapters 1-4 introduce the primary issue of biblical authority, its inspiration and interpretation. Chapters 5-8 discuss the role of women in ministry and the issue of women's ordination in the context of the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible. Chapter 9 provides contemporary examples of the struggle for biblical authority in relation to the women's ordination issue in three mainline Protestant churches, followed by a concluding chapter. Sources used include books written by Adventist authors and others, papers prepared by Adventist scholars for the Role of Women Commission (1988-1989), articles, and public statements made in open forums or in sermons.

Many of the problems discussed in this volume relative to the authority of the Bible and its interpretation I confronted in my former church. At the time, I was a parish pastor on the fringe of momentous events and had no status or platform from which to speak. I could only watch helplessly as my church slid ever deeper into limited biblical authority.

It would be unrealistic to expect everyone to agree with everything said in the chapters that follow, and I do not anticipate that kind of a response. However, I do expect what is said to be taken seriously. If there is truth in this analysis, I pray that our Lord will use it to assist the Seventh-day Adventist church in avoiding the dangers to which other denominations have already succumbed.

The reader will discover in the following chapters a rejection of the approach to Bible interpretation known as the *historical-critical method*. I wish, however, to make it absolutely clear that while aspects of the historical-critical method or its conclusions, and cultural conditioning, are used by some proponents of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church, there are other proponents who do not employ them. I invite both categories of Bible students to prayerfully consider the material in this volume.

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The Southeastern California Conference deserves special mention. Their gracious invitation for me to present a position paper on

women in ministry at the Loma Linda University Church in October 1990 provided the impetus for this book. The Christian hospitality and cordiality extended to me on that occasion are pleasant memories.

All Scripture quotations used are from the *New International Version* (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.

NOTES

1. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), pp. 205-206.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1992* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), p. 5.
3. Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1955), p. 33.

Chapter One

SOLA SCRIPTURA: A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

Perhaps the contents of this book can best be understood if the reader knows something of the significance the Bible has played in my spiritual pilgrimage, and the reasons why, though supportive of women in ministry, I felt compelled after two years of resistance to enter the debate on women's ordination.

Someone recently suggested that the reason I have elected to stand with those in opposition to the ordination of women in ministry may be due to the fact that I am a recent convert to Adventism. The implication is that recent converts are traditionally more conservative than long-time members, and that with the passing of time new converts tend to become more liberal in theology and lifestyle. That, however, is certainly not true in my case, as my conservatism has roots that go back much farther than my transition from the Lutheran to the Adventist faith and ministry. It was because I was already a theological conservative, pastoring in an increasingly liberal church, that I was able finally to become a Seventh-day Adventist. My impression in 1970 was that the Seventh-day Adventist church was theologically conservative and had always been so. At the grassroots level I believe it is basically conservative today.

In my younger days I was idealistic, preferring to think of things as they ought to be. I resisted the use of the terms "liberal" and "conservative." With age, however, has come a more realistic view in which those terms are no longer offensive but accurate. Reality has forced me to recognize that there are liberal and conservative politicians, economists, and theologians. Liberal the-

ology holds that the Bible is a fallible human documentary of religious history and experience, whereas conservative theology holds that the Bible is God's revelation of divine truth.[1]

In spite of the fact that there are strong pressures, theological and cultural, toward the liberalizing of the Adventist faith, I find it difficult to accept the inevitability of converts' eventually losing their initial conservatism.

From perspective that comes from having attended one of the most liberal Lutheran theological seminaries in the United States and facing liberal pressure on a daily basis for almost ten years of ministry, I am happy to say that such pressure can deepen conservatism rather than destroy it. One does not have to succumb, provided that the faith relationship with the Lord, together with the Biblical foundation, is unshakable.

The great importance of the Bible in my spiritual development is discussed here in terms of the eagerness with which I read it during the early stages, my quest for faith, the period of ministerial training, ministry in my former church, the period of confrontation by Adventism, and the persuasiveness of Biblical arguments.

Eager to Read the Bible

There is no question but that the new convert to the Christian faith tends to read the Bible in a literal and trusting way. That was certainly my experience. My first year as a believer, at 23 years of age, is still vivid in memory. How eager I was to read the Bible! How excited by its message! I was deeply interested in, and moved by, the details of that message, not just with what is referred to today as the "direction" or "trajectory" of the Bible. In those days I felt that God was speaking to me directly through the Bible. That was before my reading of the Bible was complicated by theological issues and intellectual problems and doubts, most of them raised by teachers who used the historical-critical method of interpretation. Proponents of this approach allege that the Bible is filled with mistakes and inconsistencies, and that it can only be made fully trustworthy by employing their methods to determine which parts are divinely inspired and which are not. For me the Bible was then, and still is,

revelation from God in all its parts. I have never considered myself so clever or astute as to be able to distinguish with my finite mind what in the Bible is revelation, what is inspired, and what is not.

What Martin Luther or John Calvin, or any other theologian, had said did not interest me much at that stage of my spiritual journey. I wanted to know what the Bible said. Instinctively I knew that what the Bible said was the only trustworthy basis upon which I could safely judge what theologians and scholars say. The conviction that the Bible is the only safe guide for thought and life remains firm. In spite of what some of my professors said and the cultural pressure toward skepticism, I wanted to know the mind of God, believing the Bible to be the primary source of such knowledge. Some may consider this to be simplistic and unsophisticated, but I make no apology for it. If I did not hold such a firm conviction regarding the Bible as revelation, I would not be a Seventh-day Adventist today.

Unfortunately, for many people it is a real struggle to let God speak through His Word directly to the heart. All around us we hear voices saying we cannot trust the historicity of the Bible, that the Bible is nothing more than a record of the human understanding of God and religion, that the New Testament is nothing more than the expression of the early church's faith, and furthermore, that the faith of today's church is expressed in ways that can differ from the Bible's account. Some of those voices tell us that the Bible was culturally conditioned to such an extent that it cannot be read and interpreted literally and applied to our time.

Quest for Faith

The story began in my early twenties when the quest for faith brought me in contact with a Lutheran minister who, with earnest conviction and power, preached the Bible. It was his clear expository preaching of the Bible, viewed as God's revelation and not as man's understanding of God confined to a certain period of time, that won me to the Christian faith. Such preaching nurtured my growing faith for many years, and when the Lord called me to the ministry I was determined to be the kind of preacher who is able to

feed his flock on the Word of God with no compromise or deviation.

Early on I learned to appreciate the value of the written Word of God. I became firmly convinced that the Bible was His revelation, not just the best book around; that it was inspired, infallible, and absolutely trustworthy. I believed the Bible revealed Christ as well as vital information concerning the will of God for faith and life. Hearing the Bible powerfully preached, and eagerly reading its message, touched me deeply. I became a Christian believer and within a year, at age 24, I responded to the call to ministry.

Training for Ministry

My response to the call to the ministry involved four years of college followed by three years of seminary education and training. The first two of those years I attended a Lutheran junior college, at which I was first exposed to a critical approach to the Bible. Evangelism and personal piety were suspect, and it was questioned whether there were any absolutes. I did not realize it at the time, but the professor who taught Bible had his theological roots in the most liberal branch of Lutheranism in America, where he was theologically trained and served as pastor for many years.

However, I was attracted to the teacher of the German language courses, an ordained minister with theological roots in one of the most conservative branches of Lutheranism in America.

The next two years I attended Northern Michigan University, where the major emphasis was on the training of public school teachers and social workers for the State of Michigan. Many of the faculty were atheistic secularists. It was there I learned what it means to be a Christian disciple and to defend the faith. On many occasions it was necessary to dispute with professors who knew I was a Christian preparing for the ministry, and who never overlooked an opportunity to ridicule my faith and attempt to discredit or undermine it. Some professors who were members of local Christian churches had a decidedly liberal and skeptical view of the Bible. One of them took particular delight in derisively making reference to "the blood gospel."

Because I was settled in the conviction that the Bible was God's self-revelation, that it was inspired by His Spirit and therefore utterly trustworthy, my college experience did not shatter my faith and confidence in the Bible. I began seminary training with a high view of the Bible that was hammered out on the anvil of skepticism and derision.

My seminary training involved three years of struggle against the pressure toward skepticism produced by the historical-critical interpretation of the Bible, and the consequent liberalizing of the faith. One example of liberalization was that of seminarians drinking alcoholic beverages and excusing it on the grounds that Jesus was spoken of in the Bible as a "winebibber."

The negative reaction of a few students to that kind of thing met with scorn. "Down With Piety" read the crude flag made from a bed sheet that flew from the seminary flagpole one morning. This, and more, was the outcome of a secular, humanistic approach to the Bible. The historical-critical method of Bible interpretation, which had captured theological scholarship (except within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which has remained true to the Biblical witness in the face of liberal, cultural, and feminist pressure), contributed profoundly to the situation.

During those seminary days, it was *sola scriptura* and the determination to remain faithful to the Biblical Word that required me to reject as apostate the demythologizing and form-criticism of the Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann's premise was that in order to make the teachings of the Bible palatable to the modern scientific mind, all of what it contains that is unacceptable to the scientific world-view (he called them "myths") was to be expunged. In his view such things as the six-day creation, the virgin birth of Christ, His resurrection and the resurrection of the dead, and above all the second advent of Christ, must be wrenched from the Bible as incompatible with the modern educated and sophisticated mind. Bultmann's motive was certainly sound, for he honestly and sincerely desired to reach the modern mind with the Gospel. However, his method proved devastating to the Biblical message. One wonders how many people have been won to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by those who have subscribed to Bultmann's views on the Bible.

Though it was a daily battle, by the grace of God I survived those three years with faith in the Bible as the inspired revelation of God intact. At the age of 31, after seven long years of college and seminary training, I began to preach out of that confidence in the Bible that had nurtured my faith since the age of 23.

Ministry

During the next ten years, Biblical faith continued to erode in the branch of Lutheranism in which I pastored, as more and more of liberal theology and lifestyle was adopted. The literal creation and the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 were denied as evolutionary ideas became popular. The ecumenical movement and the doctrinal compromise attendant to it caused further destruction of Biblical faith. Because the institutional church must justify its existence, though it may have lost the Biblical message, the social gospel filled the void created by skepticism concerning the authority and reliability of the Bible.

The Biblical faith of the church in which I began ministry disappeared in the 1962 merger forming the Lutheran Church in America; it had no chance to survive, though some nostalgic attempts were made to keep it alive. Many ministers finally succumbed to the secularization of faith caused by the method of Bible interpretation used by professors in the seminaries of the new denomination. The literal interpretation of Scripture practiced by major segments of Protestantism since the 16th century was devastated by the doubt cast upon the Biblical text by modern secular thought and by the historical-critical method adopted by many contemporary theologians. I watched helplessly as the relativization of the Bible made shipwreck of the faith and lifestyle (piety) of many people. Throughout my first ten years of my ministry I never felt completely at home or spiritually safe. I felt a perpetual struggle.

Yet during those ten years I enjoyed a successful ministry, first as pastor of a three-congregation parish, and then, for most of that time, as pastor of a 600-member congregation. I still think of those parishes and their people with great affection. I preached the Bible to my congregations week after week while, in my professional contacts, the

issue of Biblical authority emerged in conversation and discussion with fellow ministers. Frequently I found myself defending the authority of the Bible. I recall one dramatic confrontation with a fellow minister who, after hearing my plea for trust in the full authority of the Bible, pointed his finger in my face and vehemently said, "The time is soon coming when people like you will not be allowed in the ministry!" In the midst of that kind of turmoil, I was confronted by Adventism and the seventh-day Sabbath.

Confronted by Adventism[2]

As I grappled with myself over the Sabbath, in a desperate search for direction I counseled with three Lutheran theologians. Though they did so in different ways, all of them upheld the *principle* of the Sabbath while insisting that the observance of the Sabbath on the seventh-day of the week was part of Jewish culture. It was certainly a command of God, they said, but only for the time of Moses. *Contemporary* culture recognizes Sunday as the day of rest and of the Lord's resurrection. The other nine commandments, however, did still apply, as they were considered to be moral, ethical, and corroborated by creation and human society.

Such counsel was initially pleasing, as I was looking for reasons *not* to believe the Sabbath. But over the next three years all the reasons I could muster were dashed to bits by the fundamental principle of Bible interpretation adhered to by faithful Protestants since the sixteenth century. It was Luther's principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible alone, and the belief that *the Bible is to be interpreted literally unless the context indicates otherwise.* In my lonely struggle I did my best to apply that principle to the seventh-day Sabbath, studying every Bible text that referred to it.

Only one conclusion was possible: the Bible upheld the seventh-day Sabbath. Study of the Bible itself convinced me that those three theologians were wrong. I entered the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in the fall of 1970 as a Master of Theology student. During my course of study I was overjoyed to discover the kind of trust in the Bible that had initially won me to the Christian faith. I did not become a Seventh-day Adventist because the

Seventh-day Adventist church decided the seventh-day Sabbath was important, *but because of the discovery that the Sabbath is a fundamental teaching of the Bible*, and that it is binding upon Christians today, culture and the opinions of others notwithstanding.

During my study at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (1970-71), at their gracious invitation it was my privilege to meet on Wednesday evenings with five faculty members: W. G. C. Murdoch (Dean of the Seminary), Thomas Blincoe, C. Mervyn Maxwell, Hans LaRondelle, and Wilber Alexander. The only condition was that I let them know a week in advance what subject I would like to discuss. When subjects such as the Sabbath, prophecy, the second advent of Christ, baptism, the church, and Ellen G. White, were considered, Bibles were opened and searched for the answers. It was masterfully done, and very convincing. I found a spiritual home and joined the Seventh-day Adventist church and its ministry, confident it was in submission to the full authority of the Bible.

Biblical Arguments Persuasive

After 20 years in the Adventist ministry as pastor and teacher, I resisted pressure to become involved in the women's ordination issue. I did not want to be crucified on that cross. I do not enjoy conflict or disputing with people I love and respect. But while I am not anti-women in ministry, I am pro-Scripture. Increasingly disturbed by the way the Bible was used to persuade the church in this matter, I could not stay safely on the sidelines. I saw the way the issue developed as a challenge to full Biblical authority, part of a larger trend to relativize Scripture and signalling a breakdown in Adventist consensus regarding principles of Bible interpretation. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I began to share my views and my concerns. A major consequence of that sharing was my appointment by the President of the General Conference to serve on the Role of Women Commission. The assignment given the Commission was to prepare study papers, meet together on two occasions for discussion, and then make recommendations to the church.

The final recommendation of the Commission was, (1) that women not be ordained, but (2) that they be authorized to perform

all the essential functions of the pastor without ordination. I could not vote in favor of the recommendation because (1) it reduced ordination to a meaningless ritual, and (2) it was blatantly sexist, denying ordination to women only on the basis of gender, not on the basis of Biblical teaching. I still find it hard to understand how it was possible for pro-ordination members of the Commission to compromise their principles and support it.

Martin Luther's bold affirmation concerning the Bible has rung strongly for Protestants down through the five centuries since he defended it. In the face of the mightiest religious power on earth in his day, he spoke words to this effect: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen." This is the spiritual heritage I have gladly and willingly brought with me into the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is the Reformation heritage honored by faithful Lutheran Christians for generations and by the Seventh-day Adventist church since its inception. I believe that Seventh-day Adventists in their finest manifestations are determined to stand even more firmly on the Bible than did Luther, and that they are willing and ready to pay any price imposed by society or organized persecution in order to do so. Adventist history, and the testimonies of many of its most prominent leaders, evangelists, and missionaries of the past, support that belief. Ellen G. White said of Martin Luther:

> Zealous, ardent, and devoted, knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for religious faith but the Holy Scriptures, Luther was the man for his time; through him God accomplished a great work for the reformation of the church and the enlightenment of the world.[3]

Adventists, Lutherans, and other Protestants on the threshold of the twenty-first century need to hear such words again and again. Let them burn their way into our hearts and minds! The Reformation is not over. The devil, though defeated at Calvary, has not yet laid down his weapons of deceit and distortion. And God is not finished with His people yet.

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister and teacher, I see the necessity for continued affirmation of the Bible, not culture or human demands, as the primary source of truth for faith and life. I believe that Biblical arguments are persuasive and should always take precedence over scientific, cultural, psychological, sociological, and philosophical arguments. The following chapters of this book discuss the reasons I believe any other approach to the interpretation of the Bible will ultimately prove devastating to the Adventist message and faith. I am not satisfied that there are adequate cultural reasons for being a Seventh-day Adventist. I must have Biblical justification that is able to withstand the skepticism of human reason.

I have always believed in the idea of progressive revelation—if it is understood to mean God's act in giving further light on the truths in His Word. But I do not believe it means that God leads the church and its members to beliefs and practices that are out of harmony with Scripture. If He did, Sunday keeping Christians would have a pretty good case for that practice. Nor can I accept the idea that progressive revelation means that contemporary views supercede the clear teaching of the Bible. Had I heard such reasoning from those five Adventist theologians I met with on Wednesday evenings in 1970-71, I doubt if I would be a Seventh-day Adventist today. Such reasoning would have echoed the three Lutheran theologians with whom I spoke concerning the Sabbath. Thorough confusion and frustration would have been the consequence, and I might have abandoned the faith altogether in the face of irreconcilable inconsistency.

Seventh-day Adventism began as a dynamic movement with its goal the revival of Biblical faith and reformation of lifestyle among all Christians everywhere. In response to the command of Jesus to go into all the world with the Gospel, it was practicing effective techniques of evangelism long before Billy Graham appeared on the international scene. A missionary movement with a global vision and strategy throughout its history, the evangelistic, educational, and medical ministry of Adventism is without peer. Its revival-reformation-evangelistic-missionary vision has resulted in unprecedented growth in membership around the world, a virtual explosion producing an average of over 1200 baptisms per day in the last

decade, mostly outside of Europe and North America, a fact not given much publicity in the Protestant-evangelical media.

With numerical and economic power concentrated in North America, and with a basically conservative leadership, the Seventh-day Adventist church has maintained a remarkable unity in theology and lifestyle up to the present time. This unity can be attributed largely to the vision and mission mentioned above. Now, however, a new era has arrived. The vast majority of Adventist believers live outside of Europe and North America. Consequently, numerical power (if not economic power) has shifted to the overseas Divisions, particularly Central and South America, Africa, and the Far East. Well taught by Adventist missionaries, these areas of Adventism still hold, by and large, to the full authority of the Bible and have not been significantly influenced by the historical-critical method of interpretation and by the liberalizing forces at work in Europe and North America. This was reflected at the Indianapolis General Conference session in 1990 when, during the debate on the ordination of women, a delegate from Africa waved his Bible in the air and said that as far as African Adventists are concerned, "if the Bible has spoken, that is good enough for us!" One wonders how long they will be able to resist erosion of full Biblical authority as more and more of their people are educated and exposed to contemporary ideas whose roots are in Europe (especially Germany) and North America, and which have proved devastating to the Biblical faith of much of Protestantism in these places.

Some are of the opinion that the women's ordination issue as it was presented and debated at the 1990 General Conference session exposed the fault line along which any possible schism could occur within Adventism. Such a schism would be absolutely catastrophic for the church claiming to be the Biblical remnant. There are already advocates of women's ordination proposing that world Divisions of the church, or even local Conferences, be permitted to go their own way in this matter. This, of course, would shatter the historic unity of Adventism as a world church, contributing to fragmentation into national or regional churches.

This is a very large price to pay in order to meet the demands of a small minority in North America.

Perhaps sensing the reality of the fault line, the Lutheran observer at the Indianapolis session, in his address to the delegates on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, made an eloquent appeal for ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Adventists. Following his address I spoke with him and he asked me twice if I heard what he said. I replied that I had but that the Adventist understanding of ecumenism was quite a bit different from his and from those he represented. For Adventists, ecumenism means a unity based on the Bible rather than on compromise. It needs to be said that he is a member and pastor in the most ecumenical and theologically liberal Lutheran Church in the United States, the recently merged Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The dominant ecumenical-theological power in the formation of the ELCA was the former Lutheran Church in America (LCA), whose ministry I left in 1971 to join the Seventh-day Adventist church. Theological seminaries of the ELCA, training persons for ministry, are dominated by the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation.[4]

The ecumenical interest of the ELCA goes far beyond the unification of all national Lutheran churches; it embraces the reunification of Catholicism and Protestantism. Significantly, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which has consistently rejected the historical-critical method, is not a member of the Lutheran World Federation, has not participated in recent Lutheran mergers, and consistently refuses to ordain women on the grounds that such a practice cannot be supported by Scripture. There is an interrelationship among ecumenism, the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation, and the ordination of women, which hinges on the understanding of Biblical inspiration and interpretation.

Conclusion

The reader should know by now and understand why, as one who has believed in and defended the full authority of the Bible for more than three decades, I could not remain aloof from the issue of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Having witnessed the tragic loss of faith in the authority of the Bible in my

previous denomination, I could not in good conscience watch my present church drift slowly in what I perceive to be the same direction without adding my voice to those of other colleagues in protest. I take great comfort from the fact that the positions relative to Biblical authority, Biblical interpretation and feminism, as well as reasons for support of women in ministry while opposing their ordination expressed in this volume, are shared by countless others in my church, as well as by reputable Bible scholars and theologians in other denominations.[5] I am also comforted by the protesting voices found among Episcopal, Lutheran, Baptist, Christian Reformed, and other denominations who have been or are involved in an identical struggle. While our Episcopalian friends appear to have lost their battle for the full authority of the Bible, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention are winning theirs. This is why I believe that the Seventh-day Adventist church, which historically has been committed to full Biblical authority, will resist cultural demands in reaffirmation of that commitment, come what may.

NOTES

1. See "Liberalism and Conservatism in Theology," in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), pp. 384-385.

2. The story is told in detail in *Stranger In My Home* (1987) by C. Raymond Holmes, and *No Turning Back* (1988) by Shirley S. Holmes (POINTER Publications, 611 Niemela Rd., Wakefield, MI 49968).

3. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 120.

4. For an excellent account of the situation among Lutherans today, see *The Death of the Lutheran Reformation*, by Craig S. Stanford (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Stanford Publishing [address: P.O. Box 5672, Fort Wayne, IN 46895], 1988).

5. See *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). See also the *Danvers Statement* in Appendix A of this volume, beginning on p. 183.

Chapter Two

TWO DIVERGENT METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

Any discussion of how the Bible is to be read and interpreted must begin with a statement concerning its authorship and the basis on which Christians accept its authority. The Bible says of itself, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16 RSV). The NIV reads, "All Scripture is God-breathed . . . ." The reference is to the whole Bible, all of which was inspired by God.

For Seventh-day Adventists this has always meant that "the preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses. Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book. This work continued during the long period of sixteen hundred years—from Moses, the historian of creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel [the Book of Revelation]," and that "the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His [God's] will."[1]

Ellen White's thinking regarding the inspiration, infallibility, and accuracy of the Bible is, to borrow a feminist phrase, "in the direction of" full biblical authority.

While the Bible is written by human hands and manifests the characteristics of its writers, God is its Author. The believer accepts its divinity by faith. The Bible presents truth with a harmony underlying the perspectives of its different writers. Human knowledge does not test the Bible's inspiration or validity; rather, the Bible tests human knowledge.

Does this mean that human instruments were unimportant in the writing of Scripture? Certainly not. The human agency is

recognized, yet because of the operation of divine inspiration there is no distortion, either personal or cultural, of the divine intent. Scripture is "God-breathed," not the result of human initiative or imagination (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

While not subscribing to a dictation model of verbal inspiration, the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist church believes that the Bible is the inspired revelation of God, infallibly and unerringly revealing His will (as this and the following chapter will indicate), certainly puts it more in line with the historical-grammatical than with the historical-critical approach to the Bible.

Historical-Critical Danger Recognized

The 1974 Bible Conferences sponsored by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists may rank in importance, historically, with the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. As one then in the early joys of accepting the Adventist message, I still recall with pleasure the confidence I felt as I listened to the kind of studies I had learned to expect from Seventh-day Adventist scholars. The Bible Conferences reinforced my conviction that I had found a secure, Bible-based spiritual home. Recently I reread the two documents produced for those meetings and again felt a surge of confidence.[2]

I perceived that a major motivation for the 1974 Bible Conferences was to expose the dangers to the Adventist faith inherent in the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation, and to hold the line regarding a more literal interpretation. The Conferences alerted the scholars, teachers, ministers, and administrators of the church to the nature of the challenge that is brought to traditional Adventist interpretation and doctrine by various forms of biblical criticism.

Although Adventists have rejected the dictation/verbal inspiration concept, the Conferences did not avoid the terms "inerrant" and "infallible" with respect to the message and historicity of the Bible. No doubt this was due to the recognition that biblical criticism is in conflict with biblical infallibility. Nor was there any hesitancy to refer to a *correct* understanding of the Word of God. If there is a correct understanding to be sought, the presuppositions one has about the Bible and the principles used in its interpretation

become crucial matters indeed. The unity and doctrinal strength of the church depend on a consensus of what these are.

Importance of Presuppositions

Adventists have come to the Bible presupposing that it is a unified whole, believing that when all the parts of the Bible are carefully studied it is possible to arrive at a unified system of truth, sometimes referred to as a "chain of truth." On the other hand, allowing for multiple systems of interpretation (hermeneutical pluralism) presupposes that there is no underlying unity or harmony to the Bible and that it can be interpreted in many different yet equally truthful ways. The reader has a virtual smorgasbord from which to choose.

Interpreters of the Bible are guided in their interpretation by what they believe about the Bible itself. Presuppositions concerning the nature and authority of the Bible are keys to interpretation and understanding. An essential consensus on presuppositions existed among the presenters at the 1974 Bible Conferences. Their legacy to the church remains in the record of those Conferences and deserves restudy and reaffirmation.

Following is a summary of presuppositions gleaned from the Conference documents:

1. The message of Scripture did not originate from human sources but came "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12 NASB).
2. The Bible writers speak with the authority of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:27).
3. The written word has real authority even to the point where it determines the character and limits of fellowship and inclusion in the church (2 Thess. 3:14).
4. What the apostles wrote is to be regarded as a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).
5. The Bible is the unerring standard, on the basis of which all human ideas are to be tested. The biblical text is an inerrant expression of the will of God and the infallible guide to faith and practice.

6. Any approach to the Bible that rejects its self-interpretation undermines its authority. The very nature of the Bible and its inspiration requires that no external means (such as tradition, science, or culture) be normative in its interpretation.

7. Though written by human authors, the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus constitutes, in all its parts, God's holy Word to mankind.

8. The Christian faith is a historical religion based on the acts of God recorded and prophesied in the Bible.

9. The message of the Bible is historically reliable and experientially powerful.

10. Christian experience rests on the historical accuracy and reliability of the biblical material, on the basis of which the authenticity of the experience can be measured.

11. The purpose of revelation is not just to communicate information but to transform people.

12. It is erroneous to think that because the Bible writers lived in a different world and culture, theirs is inferior and ours superior.

13. Science and religion are not mutually exclusive realms of human thought but are a harmonious witness to truth. The harmony sought is based on fully reliable biblical and scientific data.

14. The Bible presents a cluster of conditions in the church and her witness as the reason for the "delay" in the Lord's return. Thus the church is to live, not on the edge of the second advent but on the edge of mission. Jesus will come when the gospel has been preached throughout the whole world. The state of the church, the quality of its life and witness, is a vital element in that world-wide proclamation.

These presuppositions were derived from the Bible itself, are supported by the views of Ellen G. White, and have determined for Adventists the principles to be applied in biblical interpretation. When it comes to the use and interpretation of Scripture, Ellen G. White says: "You must learn the simple act of taking God at His word. Then you have solid ground beneath your feet."[3]

If presuppositions change, the faith response will change. For many, what was once believed about the Bible is no longer believed.

Change in basic presuppositions results in far more than pluralism of ideas on non-central biblical teachings. While some thinkers are of the opinion that pluralism may be an inevitable consequence of the personal nature of religious experience or the times in which we live, this does not mean it is good or right. Likemindedness is God's will (Philip. 2:2), the ideal to be sought for, worked for, and held up before the church, especially when it comes to an understanding of the Word of God. "Aim for perfection," writes Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit, "listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). This ideal is possible to attain by the power of the Gospel to transform the church and its members.

That which shatters unity of spirit and core beliefs is change in the presuppositions concerning the nature of the Bible, giving rise to pluralism of views. We are not faced merely with minor change in interpretation of incidentals. To suggest that what we need is to keep existing pluralism below the level at which it becomes destructive is to admit its threat to the unity and doctrinal integrity of the church. Furthermore, how can the church and its doctrine remain unified if divergent, as opposed to parallel, tracks of biblical interpretation are being followed? Such divergence militates against the attempt. Hermeneutical unity and pluralism cannot exist side-by-side; they are divergent tracks moving off in different directions.

The presuppositions of the historical-critical method are based on a rationalism in which the Bible is treated like any other product of the human mind. The method requires practical atheism in order to function. This leads to the separation of the message of Scripture from the history in which it is embedded and through which it was transmitted. The method is not neutral. It is not unbiased. It leaves the student of the Bible with a choice, not between what God says and what people believe but between what one theologian believes and what another theologian believes. The method requires suspicion (called "methodological doubt"); doubt begins to predominate over faith, and the biblical tradition itself is questioned from an increasingly secular base. For Adventists this would mean the eventual, perhaps even inevitable, questioning of the remnant

tradition and all that it implies about the Sabbath and the final events of history.

Principles of Interpretation Summarized

Following is a summary of the principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) espoused by the 1974 Bible Conferences:

1. The interpretation of the Bible requires an approach of faith and reverence.
2. The meaning of the faith today is not something completely different from the meaning intended by the Bible writers.
3. There is a basic agreement between the meaning of a Bible text when written and the correct interpretation of that text now.
4. Biblical history is vital in illustrating how God acts in relation to persons, nations, and events.
5. The human language used to communicate divine truth through Scripture is meaningful language; it is itself the key to the revelation.
6. Scripture must be understood as it was originally expressed. The very words of Scripture are always to be taken in their literal meaning unless there is contextual evidence to the contrary.
7. The Bible is its own interpreter. It must not be interpreted by the use of an external principle such as tradition, philosophy, science, history, or culture. To do so leads to a distortion of its own inner message.

The Adventist scholars at the 1974 Bible Conferences used the historical-grammatical method, in which the history, the context, the meaning of words, grammatical structure, and the essential unity and harmony of Scripture are a part of the interpretive process. They did not support, as principles of interpretation, the judgment of sacred history on the same basis as secular history, or the use of literary criticism to get behind the words of Scripture to find what *really* happened or was meant. Their presuppositions concerning Scripture precluded such views. The Scriptures were seen to be a revelation from God, though written by men; they are

not just the literary creation of the writers. There was no assumption that the contemporary Christian community can respond to God's revelation in ways that may be contradictory to Scripture and yet be equally as valid as the response of the Old and New Testament believing communities.

The presuppositions and principles outlined above form the basis for the "Methods of Bible Study Committee Report," accepted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at its Annual Council on October 12, 1986. The report states: "Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages."[4]

Methods Clarified

For the sake of simplification, the two divergent methods of interpreting the Bible—historical-grammatical and historical-critical—can be clarified by way of five principles for each.

Historical-Grammatical

1. The principle that the Bible is God's revelation.
2. The principle of faith.
3. The principle of God's revelation in history.
4. The principle of divine inspiration of the biblical text.
5. The principle of analysis of both the historical context and the literary-grammatical construction of the material.

Using this method, the interpreter approaches the Bible as God's self-revelation, asking the faith question: "What does it mean?" The interpreter believes that God has revealed His will by His mighty acts in history, in the history of Israel and the early church. The account of His revelation in the Bible is divinely inspired and is, therefore, infallible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it, the meaning and application of the text can be discovered and understood as the historical context and the grammatical construction of the material are carefully studied. This

method holds that the meaning for faith today is not something different from the meaning intended by the Bible writers for their time and place. The historical-grammatical method of interpretation allows the Bible to have full authority relative to faith and life for all time.

Historical-Critical

1. The principle that the Bible is the record of man's understanding of God.
2. The principle of doubt.
3. The principle of human reason.
4. The principle of analogy.
5. The principle of correlation.

The interpreter using this method approaches the Bible as the record of man's understanding of God and religion, asking the doubter's question, "Is it true?" Without faith involved in the interpretive process, human reason that rejects the supernatural takes over in the search for answers. Contemporary experience and world-view become the criteria by which the biblical text is analyzed. Using the principle of analogy, the interpreter concludes that forces similar to those which determine attitude and understanding in contemporary culture, such as the perceived dominance of a patriarchal world-view, must have shaped the thought of the Bible writer, which allows for the conclusion that certain Bible passages were culturally conditioned and thus are not applicable to contemporary situations. The principle of correlation holds that all historical events are interrelated (correlated) to others in a cause-effect relationship. Since all historical explanation rests on this chain of cause and effect within the human and natural realm, divine intervention (miracles, inspiration, etc.) is ruled out. Thus the historical-critical method of interpretation limits the authority of the Bible for faith and life, making it merely a human, historical book.

The first is a faith approach, the second a secular approach. The historical-grammatical method posits that the history recorded in the Bible is factual and reliable because the account is divinely

inspired. For this method the details in the biblical account are as important as the overall message. The historical-critical method posits that the Bible is a human product that came into being by means of an evolutionary process, and that the history it records cannot be assumed factual and reliable. Therefore the history of the confessing community which produced the Bible is more authoritative. For this method the details in the biblical account are not as important as the overall direction, or trajectory, of the message, because the specifics are not assumed to be reliable.

It should be obvious that these two sets of interpretive principles are incompatible, and that they lead to divergent and contradictory conclusions. Perhaps it should be noted that while some interpreters reject the historical-critical method itself, they nevertheless accept many or all of its conclusions. But if the method is unsound, can it produce conclusions that are trustworthy?

Ellen G. White warns us of the improper use of human reason:

> I beseech those who are laboring for God not to accept the spurious for the genuine. Let not human reasoning be placed where sanctifying truth should be. Christ is waiting to kindle faith and love in the hearts of His people. Let not erroneous theories receive countenance from the people who ought to be standing firm on the platform of eternal truth. God calls upon us to hold firmly to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.[5]

The Seventh-day Adventist church has adopted the historical-grammatical method of Bible interpretation. This is one reason why, for example, the study of the biblical languages is considered to be an essential element in ministerial training.

Alternatives to Biblical Authority

Acceptance of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation often leads either to theological elitism or to some form of charismatic subjectivism, or both. Why? When the Bible's author-

ity is denied, there are only two alternatives left: the authority of the church expressed through its theologians and/or administrators, or the authority of "the Spirit" expressed through so-called charismatic renewal. In the former, the theological elite will determine for the church what in the Bible can be taken as authoritative Scripture. In the latter, religious experience and excitement rather than the written Word of God authenticate the faith. The first leads to a Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of the church, and the second to a pentecostal or charismatic understanding.

Let us briefly see why these two approaches cannot be accepted by Bible-believing Adventists in any theological discussion, including that concerning ordination to the gospel ministry.

The Church and the Bible

The institutional authority of the church can never supersede the Word of God. The church's authority is derived, not inherent. As long as the church is faithful to the Bible, its authority is without question. But when it is no longer faithful to the Bible, its authority must be questioned. Adventists believe in the infallibility of the Scriptures, not in the infallibility of administrators, clergy, educators, theologians, personal experience, committees, or councils of the church.

The pastoral office and the Word of God cannot be separated from each other. If the office is separated from the Word, the office has no valid existence. The priestly (servant)[6] role of the ministry cannot be separated from the prophetic (reproof) role. When the minister ceases to be a prophet, that is to say a preacher of the truth of the Word, the minister may continue to be recognized as priest but no longer holds the office of the Word. The minister may have institutional authority but does not have divine authority, and the institutional church whose ministry is not in harmony with the Word does not have divine authority to lay hands of ordination upon anyone.

The administrative authority of the church does not supersede the authority of the Bible; the church cannot ordain someone to ministry whose "call" is not in harmony with the Bible, no matter

how much it would like to do so. The church must recognize the difference that sometimes exists between a supposed human "right" and the will of God, and when the biblical issue is clear it must always opt for the will of God, even though doing so may cause pain. No other course is safe. Willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ and the Word of God is a fundamental mark of the apostolate (Philip. 3:10).

If we were to say that the primary evidence of a call to the pastoral office is the authority of the church, we would elevate the authority of the church above that of the Word.

Ordination to the pastoral office cannot be thought of simply as a sociological or administrative matter. It is theological and deeply spiritual. The authority to ordain is the authority of the Word and the Spirit, and they must agree. Anyone ordained to the pastoral office is obligated to remain in submission to the Lord of that office and to His Word.

The Spirit and the Bible

Although a call to ministry must come personally from the Holy Spirit, a personal call to ordination never comes in isolation from Scriptural authority. By the same token, although the call must come from the church, it can never come exclusively from the church but must also come personally from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit operates both in individual lives and in the life of the faithful church, and they must agree.

If we were to say that the primary evidence of the call to ministry is the personal witness of the Spirit, we would elevate personal witness above the Word.

As long as a person is in submission to the Spirit who leads into all the truth of the Word, the Spirit can work. No minister can bear witness to the centrality of the Word of God if that Word is not central to the minister's own life. A believing congregation expects its pastor to be responsible to the Scriptures in proclamation and in living. A person who is entrusted with the pastoral office of the Word must be able to stand before a congregation and represent that Word rightly. To sabotage this trust is destructive of ministry and

of the pastoral office. The ministry of a person is always representative and symbolic, and the pastor of a Christian congregation represents the headship and fatherhood of God (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 1 Thess. 2:11; Eph. 5:1; 1 Tim. 3:5.).

It falls upon those seeking ordination to demonstrate to the church that they stand in harmony with Scripture. Ordained ministers must rightly represent the faith of the church, and the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist church rests upon the Bible. In Romans 1:1 Paul says that he was "set apart for the gospel of God." Ellen G. White indicates that this is a reference to his ordination:

> Paul regarded the occasion of his formal ordination as marking the beginning of a new and important epoch in his lifework. It was from the time of this solemn ceremony, when, just before he was to depart on his first missionary journey, he was "separated unto the gospel of God," that he afterward dated the beginning of his apostleship in the Christian church.[7]

Unity of Doctrine and Interpretation

It is not enough to confess faith in the authority of Scripture. What kind of authority is it permitted to have? Will we allow it to have full authority or limited authority? But the issue is not just biblical authority; it is how the Bible is read, interpreted, preached and taught, which will produce either a right or a wrong faith, ethic, and morality. I am aware of a denomination in which things are being done that would have been unthinkable thirty years ago. The liberalizing of faith and lifestyle (piety) was made possible by an almost imperceptible change in presuppositions about the Bible, allowing ample room for cultural pressures. This change took about thirty years to filter down to the grass roots level of church life. Some would term this "progressive," opening things up, making room, enlarging the tent. The Bible calls it lawlessness and ungodliness, the fruit of an unregenerate life.

Seventh-day Adventists need to be careful that with the nonacceptance of dictation/verbal inspiration they do not also reject the infallibility of the Bible. It is significant to note that the first article

of the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists states that the Bible is "the infallible revelation of His [God's] will." If the Bible is inspired by God though written by God's "penmen," as Ellen G. White affirms, then the infallibility of its message is assured. If it is not, then the church is in serious trouble. While she often took into account the historical background of a particular Bible text, Mrs. White always took a submissive position before the text. She fell under the critical examination of the Word, not the other way around. She said: "Take the Bible, and on your knees plead with God to enlighten your mind."[8] When His will is known, the devout believer will obey it.[9] While Adventists do not accept the dictation/verbal concept of inspiration, they believe the Bible to be infallible, to have perfect unity, to be self-consistent and factually true. They believe the *Bible*, not just believe things *about* the Bible.

What some modern interpreters of the Bible are often unhappy about are biblical teachings that oppose what contemporary culture and human desires may demand. So-called morality, justice, and equal rights are the new arguments used to circumvent some of the clear statements of Scripture. It is difficult to see how those using such arguments could possibly continue upholding the Sabbath commandment and the demands it places upon the believer. If faithful observance would cause pain and suffering, would it not soon be seen as a matter of morality to allow one to work on the Sabbath and still retain church membership? One of the presenters at the 1974 Bible Conferences raised the following provocative question:

> In endeavoring to communicate God's Word to 20th century man, are we reliable transmitters of that Word, or is there a danger that we may tend to transform the Word instead? Or stated in another way, Do we proclaim the Word in such a way that it speaks its own message—God's message—or may we unwittingly at times allow 20th-century culture and our own preconceptions to modify the gospel we proclaim?[10]

To be sure, the Bible is both a divine and a human book. But if the interpreter's primary focus is on the Bible's human dimension,

one may easily conclude that the Bible is as unreliable as any other human document. If the humanity of Scripture is emphasized to the denigration of its divinity, a logical progression of thought will lead to an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus to the denigration of His divinity. "Son of man" will have more meaning than "Son of God."

In practical terms, this paradigm shift will make preaching less doctrinal and more therapeutic, focusing less and less on revealed truth and more and more on human relationships. Moisés Silva states that "it is now claimed that a full acceptance of the critical method, with its assumption of biblical fallibility, is the only approach that does justice to the humanity of Scripture." He then accurately observes that "once we abandon the doctrine of infallibility, there is no meaningful way in which we can speak of the divine character of the Bible."[11] It seems that we are more interested in defending the human side of the Bible today than the divine side. If, as some suggest, truth and reality are seldom clear, then hermeneutical pluralism has no hope of getting truth or reality clear either.

While evangelicalism is divided denominationally, Adventism is united in one body. Unity of both doctrine and interpretation has been essential to the dynamism of its mission and the consistency of its message. Some evangelicals today are saying that it is not possible for Christians to understand the complete and unified message of the Bible. Yet such understanding is exactly what Adventism has claimed for itself in its reference to "the truth" and "the message." But if there is no longer any unity of doctrine and interpretation (a new presupposition), then truth becomes "confessional" (another new presupposition), meaning that truth is whatever any group confesses it to be—and our reason for existence as a church collapses.

Adopting multiple ways to interpret the Bible would be self-destructive for the Seventh-day Adventist church, its doctrine, its unity, its life-style, and its morality. Pluralistic hermeneutics would result in radically reconceptualizing Adventist identity. Seventh-day Adventist believers might well disappear into the grayness of contemporary pagan society. The prophetic element in Adventist theology and life would likewise disappear, as would unabashed evangelism. The inevitable consequence for the church would be fragmentation, and the Adventist church of the next century would

be virtually unrecognizable. Only by employing consistent principles of interpretation can the Seventh-day Adventist church avoid the fragmentation that would destroy the unity of the last-day church and reduce its message and mission to incredibility. It is the certainty of the Adventist witness to Scriptural authority that has been so powerful and captivating evangelistically. The church must not be content with minimal conditions for those wishing to become Adventist believers.

What is required is not political solutions for the sake of institutional peace, not an agreement to disagree, not a "bigger tent," but the kind of integrated theology that can stand up against contradictory pluralism. Adventists are faced with a call to be distinctively who they are as Seventh-day Adventists, to be increasingly more certain of their identity as Bible believers. This does not mean less conviction, but the increase of conviction concerning the inspiration of the Bible in all its parts as the infallible revelation of God's will. It means the rejection of any method of interpretation that places human intelligence above the inspired text. This is why the 1974 Bible Conferences provide a major answer to hermeneutical pluralism in the Seventh-day Adventist church, asserting, to use the words of Walter Wink, that "historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."[12]

Has the Seventh-day Adventist church been silently slipping away from the biblical position of the 1974 Bible Conferences? Have we begun to accept a principle of Bible interpretation not mentioned at that Conference, and thought not even necessary to mention by those who participated? Dr. Kenneth Strand, in his thorough fashion, while establishing the historical nature of Adventist theology and Bible interpretation, put to rest for Adventist scholarship any flirtation with existentialism, form-criticism, and demythologizing of Scripture.[13] Nobody attending that Conference could have imagined that in less than twenty years the church would be confronted with *deculturization* as a principle for Bible interpretation.

Adventist thinkers would probably agree that the Seventh-day Adventist church has reached another major crossroad in its doctrinal history. Which way will it go? Will it go the way of full or limited

biblical authority? Will it please God or please man? One of the worst dangers the church could face is the idea that simply because we are Seventh-day Adventists we are immune from apostasy and from the pervading inroads of secular humanism.

Conclusion

The following event dramatizes the situation facing not only evangelical Protestantism but the Seventh-day Adventist church as well.

In the summer of 1986 I was invited to attend the 75th anniversary of the congregation in which I served my ministerial internship as a Lutheran seminary student. I was hosted by a family I had known while I served as their student pastor 27 years before. In 1959, the wife was a devout church member. However, in spite of my evangelistic efforts and those of my immediate successors, the husband did not become a member. Imagine my surprise, and initial delight, to discover in 1986 that after almost three decades, he was not only a member of the congregation but the chairman of the church board! Nevertheless, during my stay in their home, I observed that he was still the same man I had known 27 years before. The absence of regeneration and transformation was evident in many obvious ways. He had not changed—*the church had changed* to the point where he felt comfortable in its ranks while still living the same old ungodly life. What is believed about the Bible by thought leaders and pastors, together with the principles used in its interpretation, does eventually filter down to touch church members and affect their life-style and ethics.

Accommodation is one of the greatest hindrances to sound Bible interpretation today. One senses "instinctively that the modernist was not nearly so interested in being changed by his reading of the Bible, as in changing the way the Bible was read in order to conform it to the modern spirit."[14] To be sure, we need biblical criticism—not human criticism of the text, but the critical examination of ourselves for which the text is divinely fitted. Such criticism requires a submission that appears to be far too threatening for the modern mind, which assumes it knows all and is yet

captivated by the spirit of lawlessness. If the modern rational mind has learned anything at all, it ought to be that it cannot be fully trusted the next minute.[15] The authority of Scripture must remain supreme. The movement away from historic biblical faith is often slow and gradual, sometimes at first hardly visible. When church members finally become aware of what is happening, it can be too late.

NOTES

1. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), pp. v, vii.

2. *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* and *North American Bible Conference 1974, Notebook*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.:Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974).

3. Ellen G. White, "The Mirror," *The Youth's Instructor*, August 18, 1886, p. 130.

4. See Appendix B (starting on p. 187) for the full text of the report.

5. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), p. 308.

6. "Priestly" is understood in the Protestant sense of the priesthood of all believers, characterized by humility and service, in which ordained ministers of the gospel participate.

7. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 6:1067. See also *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), where Mrs. White refers to the appointment of the twelve apostles by Jesus as their "ordination" (p. 18). Concerning the ordination by the church of Barnabas and Paul mentioned in Acts 13:3—"So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off"—Ellen White comments: "Before being sent forth as missionaries to the heathen world, these apostles were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands. Thus they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority" (p. 161). They were separated "to a definite line of service" (p. 162). The Holy Spirit, bearing witness to Paul as a "chosen vessel," "laid upon the church the work of ordaining him and his fellow laborer" (p. 163). Paul was set apart by the church for a specific function by the laying on of hands, and from that date considered himself an apostle.

8. Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), p. 23.

9. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), p. 112.

10. Kenneth A. Strand, "Toward A Balanced Hermeneutic and Avoiding of Extremes: Issues in Current Theology," p. 8, in *North American Bible Conference*

1974, Notebook (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974).

11. Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 44.

12. Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 1.

13. Strand, *A Symposium*, pp. 89-107, and *Notebook*, "Toward a Balanced Hermeneutic."

14. Wink, p. 13.

15. While Ellen G. White recognized human reason and the rational mind as God-given, she maintained that an authority higher than reason must be recognized (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 438), and that reason must not be deified (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 109-110), must not be exalted above the Word of God (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 170), must not usurp the place of divine truth (*Testimonies for the Church*, 8:298). Human reason is idolized by rationalism (*The Great Controversy*, p. 193), is subject to the weaknesses and infirmities of humanity (*Testimonies for the Church*, 5:703), and must be enlightened by God's Word (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 311).

Chapter Three

ELLEN G. WHITE AND THE BIBLE

The Seventh-day Adventist church has an advantage that other denominations do not have: a modern prophet, Ellen G. White, served in its ranks, speaking widely and writing prolifically. One of the things she wrote about was how God communicated His Word through the Bible writers. What she said about the process is highly important for the Adventist understanding of biblical revelation and the union of the divine and human in its transmission. It also has great implications for the way we read and interpret the Bible.

The two most important statements by Ellen G. White concerning the Bible's inspiration are "The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers," in *Selected Messages*, book 1 (1SM), pp. 15-23, and the introduction to *The Great Controversy* (GC), pp. v-xii. They provide us with her most comprehensive personal views concerning biblical revelation and inspiration.

Mrs. White's Concern

The statement in *Selected Messages* begins by establishing her concern regarding infidelity in biblical interpretation, which undermines the Bible's inspiration and authority and leads to the human tendency to question its reliability and truth:

> There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are question-

> ing the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days. (1SM 15)

What Mrs. White went on to say about the Bible's inspiration and authority in *Selected Messages* is in the context of her concern regarding its interpretation. She clearly recognized that even for some who accept the Bible as Word of God, the problem of skepticism and infidelity may affect the interpretation of the Bible. It is one thing to confess faith in the full authority of the Bible and another to interpret it in such a way that it has this full authority in practice. Full authority means the supremacy of Scripture over human reason and philosophy, over human and cultural demands. Recognizing the full authority of the Bible requires full submission to its teachings. It is in the interpretation of the Bible where human reason and imaginings undermine its inspiration.

A few pages later she enlarged on her concern regarding biblical interpretation:

> The disciples traveling to Emmaus needed to be disentangled in their interpretation of the Scriptures. Jesus walked with them disguised, and as a man He talked with them. . . . He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. How quickly He straightened out the tangled ends and showed the unity and divine verity of the Scriptures. How much men [including women] in these times need their understanding opened. (1SM 20-21)

In the issue of biblical interpretation, so crucial for the faith and life of the church in every age, presuppositions concerning the Bible are determinative. What were some of Mrs. White's presuppositions?

God the Author

"The Bible points to God as its author, yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers" (GC v). She said virtually the same thing in another mode of expression: "God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man" (1SM 16). While "God, as a writer, is not represented" (1SM 21), yet He is the author. When it comes to the manner in which the Bible was inspired and written, this is an important distinction which Mrs. White was very careful to apply in her discussion of the relationship between divine Author and human writers.

This presupposition recognizes God as the source of the Bible's message. The message of the Bible did not originate in the minds of its human writers, but in the mind of God. Therefore, Ellen White said that "The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God" (GC vi-vii). Her view is based on that of the Bible itself, which teaches that "all scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Scriptures are inspired because the writers were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:21).

Union of the Divine and Human

Ellen G. White had an incarnational view of the Bible, as the following statement makes clear:

> The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14. (GC vi)

A closer look at this particular statement will help us understand more clearly how she understood the relationship between

the divine and human in Scripture. Notice first that the truths of the Bible are "God-given," which is to say that the Bible's truths did not come from man; God is the source of them. Those truths were then "expressed in the language of men." "The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God" (1SM 21). "The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human" (GC vi). God is the source of divine truth, and the writer is the transmitter of that truth by means of human language. Such is the "union of the divine and the human." God is the originator, source, and motivation, the writer an active instrument in the transmission of the truth by his choice of language and expression.

Did Mrs. White imply, as others do, that because of this union the Bible is more human than divine, that it is more of an anointed human witness than a divine revelation from God? A careful reading of her own modes of expression does not allow us to conclude that she considered the Bible to be the Word of God *and* man. In her view, it is certainly not the word of man. There are thousands of references to the Bible as "Word of God" in her voluminous writings. Nowhere does she identify the Bible as the "word of man," or as "word of God and man," or as "word of man and God." In spite of its being written by human writers using human language, it is the *Word of God.*

Her own choice of words and mode of expression lead us to this inescapable conclusion regarding her view of inspiration: she believed that in some remarkable way, the divine element in the union between divine and human exercised control over the human so as to protect the final product in the transmission of God's message.

Eta Linnemann, a contemporary woman scholar, echoes Ellen G. White's view concerning the union of the divine and human in the Bible:

> It is . . . not permissible, and also not possible, to sort out the time-conditioned human word from the eternally valid divine Word. In a mixture of iron filings and sawdust, one can use a magnet to draw out the iron. God's Word, however, is not a

mixture of valid Word of God and time-conditioned word of man which can be separated from each other.[1]

The Inspired Word of God

"I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word" (1SM 17). "Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book" (GC v). In what sense is it inspired? How does such inspiration occur?

It is Mrs. White's view, and the belief of the Seventh-day Adventist church, that God inspired the writers of the Bible, not the words: "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts" (1SM 21). The mode of expression, the way words are used, whether good or bad grammatically, is theirs. Nevertheless, "He [God] guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write" (GC vi). The divine element, not the human, was in control of the process.

The literary creations of other human authors and writers can be and often are inspiring, but they are not inspired. The Bible is an inspired document because its author is God. Though there is a union between the divine and the human in the Bible, its inspiration is due to the presence of the divine. If the divine element were not present, the Bible would not be inspired, though it might be considered inspiring.

Authoritative and Infallible Revelation

"The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His [God's] will" (GC vii).

This is a comprehensive statement. It says, first, that the Holy Scriptures are a revelation of God's will. Secondly, it says that the Holy Scriptures, as the revelation of His will, are authoritative and infallible. Nowhere does Mrs. White intimate that only parts of the Bible are God's revelation. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is an authoritative and infallible revelation of His will.

Furthermore, in another reference she said that the Bible is the "unerring standard" by which human views are to be tested. This is found in a passage in which she discussed the only sound basis by which science can be evaluated. The context indicates that, in her view, the Bible, as the standard for testing human ideas, is unerring because of its divinity.

> He who has a knowledge of God and His word through personal experience has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He has proved that God's word is truth, and he knows that truth can never contradict itself. He does not test the Bible by men's ideas of science; he brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that in true science there can be nothing contrary to the teaching of the word; since both have the same Author, a correct understanding of both will prove them to be in harmony. Whatever in so-called scientific teaching contradicts the testimony of God's word is mere human guesswork.[2]

Human Language

Having stated her firm belief that the Bible is an inspired, authoritative, infallible, and unerring revelation from God, Mrs. White also had much of interest to say regarding the human language in which it was written.

In the Bible narratives, the exact order of events is not always presented (1SM 20). This is especially true of the four Gospels, which are different accounts of the same story. Each gospel certainly is stamped with the character and style of the human writer in choice of words, mode of expression, emphasis, structure, choice of what to include, and even the meaning given to events.

The truths of the Bible are often hidden and have to be carefully and diligently searched out (1SM 20). Superficial knowledge is inadequate for such deep study. Thus the student of Scripture must prepare for the task of interpretation. Yet this search of the Scriptures must spring from faith, with a "heart prepared to receive divine impressions" (1SM 20).

God has chosen to speak to mankind through the medium of "imperfect speech" (1SM 22). It is not fully possible to communicate the infinite thoughts of God by means of finite human language. However, "Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education" (1SM 22). The inspired thought is always greater than the language in which it is expressed.

It is difficult to believe that Ellen G. White ever intended to separate divine thought from human words, but rather to keep them in the close kind of relationship in which the correct unity between the divine and human elements in the Bible are maintained.

A very clear relationship exists between thought and words. Thoughts are, by their very nature, expressed in words. The Bible writer was inspired by God with thoughts that came under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then under that same influence the writer chose words with which to express the inspired thought. The Bible itself recognizes the importance and cruciality of words in communicating divine truth:

> I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19)

It is inconceivable, under this process, that an inspired thought can be expressed with words leading later interpreters to conclude that serious mistakes were made. The writer's personality may be stamped on the text by style and/or "mode of expression," but the truth of God's revelation has been preserved in this process (1SM 15). Remember that God "guided the mind" of the Bible writers "in the selection of what to speak and what to write" (GC vi).

According to Mrs. White, the Bible was not given to us in "grand superhuman language. . . . Everything that is human is

imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea" (1SM 20). Does this mean that the message of the Bible is imperfect because human instruments were used in its transmission? Hardly. Mrs. White was saying that the human writers did not perhaps always use the ideal word or expression, that the very structure and limitations of human language inhibit its capability adequately to express divine truth. In that sense it is "imperfect." But that does not mean that the words chosen will lead the reader astray or constitute untruth.

Why has the Lord chosen to communicate His Word through the medium of imperfect human language? Because of the weakness of fallen human beings. "The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate sense, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words" (1SM 22). It is not just the general truths or principles of the Bible that need to be comprehended, but also the words by which they are transmitted. In that connection, it is interesting to note that in this reference she spoke of the Bible writers' "imperfect speech" as "His [God's] words"!

Mistakes

When Mrs. White used the term "mistake" in connection with the Bible, it was in the context of a paragraph in which she spoke of the narrow-minded stumbling over *perceived* mistakes as well as over the divine truth in the Bible. We must not view this statement in isolation but in the light and in the context of everything else she has said regarding the Bible.

> Some look to us gravely and say, "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine,

> and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth. (1SM 16)

Critics of the Bible are tempted to focus on this statement and say, "See! Ellen White recognized that there are mistakes in the Bible, and we must discover what they are by the use of critical methods so as to discard them as not part of the inspired revelation."

If there are "mistakes," they are attributed to those who made subsequent copies by hand from the original Bible documents, or to later translators who may have failed accurately to translate the original languages.[3]

Notwithstanding this reference to "mistakes," Mrs. White also said, with emphasis, that

> The great truths which underlie man's duty to his fellow men and to his Maker are clearly revealed; and those who really want the truth need make no mistake. The way is not left in uncertainty, as though we were standing where four roads met, not knowing which one to take.[4]

All the so-called mistakes in the Bible allegedly uncovered by contemporary scholarship cannot make one foot stumble over divine truth that would not stumble over that which the Bible makes plain concerning God's will and His plan of salvation.

Never once did Ellen G. White write that the Bible contains errors, discrepancies, or contradictions as far as divine truth is concerned. She did, however, speak of its diversity due to the "different forms of expression" used by the writers:

> Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by

> another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony. (GC vi)

Her concern, once again, was with the way the Bible is read and interpreted. If there are problems, they are not with the text but with the reader. If the Bible is read superficially, carelessly, or with prejudice, it may appear to have discrepancies or contradictions. The reverent reader, on the other hand, who reads with faith in the Bible's inspiration and authority, is aware of its "underlying harmony," that there is "a perfect harmony through all" (GC vi). As far as the power of the Word of God over human lives is concerned, "It never makes a mistake. Its teaching will perfect in each individual a character that God can approve. It is the voice of God speaking to the soul."[5]

Attitude Toward The Bible

The fact that the Bible is revelation from God, authoritative, inspired, infallible and unerring, should govern the attitude of interpreters toward its message and its text. It cannot be improved upon by human intellect "suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said" (1SM 16). The difficulties encountered in understanding the Bible are only "supposed" (1SM 17). Finite minds are not qualified to unravel the mysteries of the Word of God, or to determine what is and what is not inspired (1SM 17). In fact, there is not one single statement from Ellen White's pen by which she intimated that there are parts of the Bible not inspired. Instead, she asserted: "When men, in their finite judgment, find it necessary to go into an examination of scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not, they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us" (1SM 17).[6]

Though the Bible was written by human writers and in human language, Ellen White counseled contemporary students of the Bible: "Let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible. It . . . is not a work the Lord has pointed out for you to do" (1SM 17).

Why? Because words will be misconstrued and imagination will "wrest them from their true meaning." The interpreter will then "entrench himself in unbelief," and "turn the truth of God into a lie" (1SM 19). "Because of the imperfections of human understanding of language, or the perversity of the human mind, ingenious in evading truth, many read and understand the Bible to please themselves. It is not that the difficulty is in the Bible" (1SM 19). "Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ" (1SM 20). "When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness" (1SM 23).

In another context, she wrote:

> To many the Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's Word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.[7]

With impassioned expression, Mrs. White urged, "Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost" (1SM 18).

Universal and Timeless Application

Did Mrs. White hold the view that the inspired teachings of the Bible were limited in application only to the times and circumstances in which they were written? On the contrary. She said that Scripture itself "plainly teaches that these promises, so far from being limited to apostolic days, extend to the church of Christ in all ages" (GC viii). Again, "These messages were given, not for those that uttered the prophecies, but for us who are living amid the scenes of their fulfillment."[8]

It can hardly be concluded that Mrs. White meant that the prophecies applied *only* to a time future to them, either. They

applied to "apostolic days" as well as "all ages." The prophecies concerning the first advent of Christ were certainly needed by the early Christians as well as by ourselves.

Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit was not only active in the inspiration of the Bible, but must also be active in opening "the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word" (GC vii).

The Bible cannot be correctly interpreted without the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the interpretive enterprise of Bible scholars, theologians, preachers, and evangelists, the Holy Spirit will never teach something that is in contradiction to the testimony of the Bible. There will never be a time when the Holy Spirit will lead the Christian church in ways that contradict the inspired Word. The church may, and often has, misunderstood or misinterpreted the Bible, but the Holy Spirit cannot be blamed for human interpretive mistakes and errors.

Mrs. White pointed out the danger to the enlightened intellect of thinking it needs no guidance from God's Word. Of such people she said:

> They are governed by impressions which they regard as the voice of God in the soul. But the spirit that controls them is not the Spirit of God. This following of impressions, to the neglect of the Scriptures, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin. It serves only to further the designs of the evil one. (GC vii-viii)

Surely in the great controversy between God and Satan the interpretation of the Bible is involved. "The same hatred of the principles of God's law, the same policy of deception, by which error is made to appear as truth, by which human laws are substituted for the law of God, and men are led to worship the creature rather than the Creator, may be traced in all the history of the past" (GC x).

Conclusion

It is obvious that in *Selected Messages*, book 1 (where the treatment is more comprehensive than in the introduction to *The Great Controversy*), Ellen G. White did not set out to make a statement concerning the Bible's inspiration and authority. The motivation for the statement was her recognition of the whole problem of biblical *interpretation*. Her great concern was interpretation leading to skepticism and infidelity, in which human reason and imagination undermine the Bible's inspiration. Everything she said subsequently about inspiration and authority must be understood in that context.

When we allow Ellen G. White to speak for herself we discover her to say that: (1) God is the Author of the Bible, (2) the Bible was inspired by God, (3) God inspired the writers of the Bible, not their words, (4) the Bible was written in their words and "modes of expression," (5) the thought, the message, of the Bible originated in God's mind, not in the minds of the different writers, (6) the Bible is the revelation of God's will in all its parts, (7) though written in imperfect human language, the Bible as revelation of God's will is infallible and the unerring standard by which human views are to be judged, and (8) God guided the minds of the Bible writers in their selection of what to write. Based on these presuppositions, she concluded (9) that the Bible is the *Word of God*. It is not God and man's word, not man and God's word, and certainly not man's word. It is God's Word in its entirety! Also based on these presuppositions, Mrs. White accepted as a major principle of interpretation (10) that the Bible cannot be confined to the times, places, and circumstances in which it was written but applies to every age.

On the basis of what Ellen G. White believed and said about the Bible, she is closer to the fundamentalist view than many of us would like to admit.

Because the Bible is God's Word, the sensitive, believing interpreter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can discern and discover divine truth without being misled by the writers themselves.

Regarding interpretation, Mrs. White was concerned lest an "infallible" human intellect take the place of an infallible Bible, in

which the interpreter thinks he or she knows better than the original writer. For example, it is far safer to trust Paul's interpretation of Genesis 1-3 than that of any contemporary scholar. Furthermore, we must guard against imposing the conclusions of modern critical scholarship on Mrs. White's own words and modes of expression.

We need to remember that, starting in the nineteenth century, many theologians and preachers claimed the right to teach and preach doctrines out of harmony with those of the church without fear of doctrinal discipline. The view developed, under the rubric of academic freedom, that scholars and preachers are not required to accept every part of the Bible as inspired or as revelation from God. Consequently, preaching lost fervor and clarity due to biblical criticism's having destroyed faith in the Bible as God's Word. But Mrs. White always referred to the Bible as the antidote for error.

NOTES

1. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 101.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1905), p. 462.

3. "Wycliffe's Bible had been translated from the Latin text, which contained many errors. . . . In 1516, a year before the appearance of Luther's theses, Erasmus had published his Greek and Latin version of the New Testament. . . . In this work many errors of former versions were corrected, and the sense was more clearly rendered" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 245).

4. *Counsels On Sabbath School Work* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1938), p. 23.

5. *The Kress Collection* (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1979), p. 98.

6. See also Ellen White's remarkable comments on 2 Timothy 3:16 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 7:919-920.

7. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 474.

8. *Selected Messages*, book 2 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 114.

Chapter Four

FULL AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

It will be obvious, as the three Protestant examples presented and discussed in chapter nine will indicate, that the major challenge facing the Christian church near the end of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first century is the authority of the written Word of God. Our understanding of the authority of the Bible is at the very heart of the faith. It has certainly been at the very heart of the Seventh-day Adventist church's faith since its inception. Therefore, the authority of the Bible is not a peripheral matter.

However, it is a matter complicated by the fact that we live in an age in which the whole idea of authority meets with objection and resistance. Since the eighteenth century, human reason has been king in the secular world, spilling over into the Christian faith as well.

The spirit of our age is of autonomous freedom—not just freedom from injustice, but freedom from all restraints and limitations. In fact, it is an age which celebrates freedom from God's truth and moral absolutes. This spirit of the age disintegrates faith in the authority of the Bible by encouraging biblical criticism, in which human reason sits in judgment on the written Word of God. Biblical criticism and related factors have removed the restraints, ushering in a total moral breakdown. It took less than one hundred years. The result is moral chaos. The fearful thing about this is that because society cannot live in chaos, authoritarian control follows inevitably.

The Most Crucial Issue

We cannot escape the issue of biblical authority, the most crucial issue of all. We need once again to ask ourselves whether true

freedom is achieved by abandoning all restraints and limitations, or by submission to the authority of God's Word. Why should we ask it? Because the human person is always under some authority. It is either personal autonomous authority, or the authority of the sovereign Lord. While self-authority is enslaving, submission to God's authority is liberating. To be set free from the person-destroying power of sin, the flesh, and the devil by the overpowering grace of God is true liberation!

True authority always lies outside of the individual. We cannot authorize ourselves, for that is no authority at all. The human being is fickle and changes his mind from moment to moment. But God does not change. He is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Authority is not based on human need but on the will and command of God. Human need exists, yes, but it does not authorize. The world needs the Gospel, the church needs to reach out with the Gospel or it will die, and you and I need to share the Gospel with the world. But we do not go into all the world and preach the Gospel on the authority of the world's need, or on the authority of the church's need to do it, or on the authority of the preacher's need to do it. Much greater motivation is required than that. We do it because God commands it! And He commands it in His Word. To respond to such authority requires faith and obedience, not just sympathy or empathy or self-fulfillment or institutional self-preservation. We must first believe that the Bible is the revelation of God's will, the Word of God, inspired and infallible. Then we must obey and submit to its claim upon us. One author has said:

> This sense of a sacred compulsion is quite different from a necessity of nature; its necessity is that of an inner destiny, the consciousness that my act is completely voluntary, and yet laid upon me by a sovereign power. Only when I possess this certainty can I hold out against every rebuff—even in spite of failure or disillusion.
>
> I cannot issue to myself my own mandate. A mandate I conferred on myself would be no real mandate at all. For I should then be in a position to rescind it at will. It would not bind me

> unconditionally. By the way of autonomy, then, by my legislating for myself, I can never get the sanction that I need.[1]

Only true authority has the right to insist on obedience. And only the Word of God is true authority. For the Christian believer there is nothing in this world that stands on the same level of authority as the written Word of God. An appeal to the Bible ought to settle every issue for the believer. If what the Bible teaches is absolute truth, then it is also just, and to submit to it is in harmony with truth and justice. What is right according to the Word of God, though it may run counter to human or cultural values, is also *just* as far as God and His people are concerned. After all, God's people are called upon to relate in justice not only to each other but to God Himself. To obey His Word is to act justly. There is nothing unjust about practicing the counsel of God.

The authority of the Bible on any issue to which it speaks rests upon its divine inspiration. God speaks to us by means of the inspired Bible; thus it is His authority, His lordship, that we recognize. "All Scripture is God-breathed [inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).[2] Notice that Paul said, "all Scripture." Nothing is to be left out of the Bible. Everything in it is inspired by God: history, chronology, prophecy, poetry, metaphor, parable, apocalyptic, etc.

Notice also that Paul did not refer to the authors, the message, or the theology as being inspired, but to the Scriptures themselves. He did not tell us just how inspiration worked on the human writers of the Bible (though Ellen G. White has given us valuable insights into the process), yet their writings are to be accepted as inspired by God. The important thing is that God was active and took the initiative in the transmission of His Word through the human writers. If all of the Bible is inspired by God, then it has practical value in training believers in righteousness and equipping them for service. Finally, in the clause "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work," the word "man" is generic and refers to both men and women. This represents a most

compelling basis upon which to affirm and confess the full authority of the Bible. The believer can only conclude, therefore, that when a Bible text is read, God speaks. What then is the believer's most appropriate response? Is it not faith, submission, and obedience? Ellen White commented:

> The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard . . . . Satan employs every possible device to prevent men [including women] from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its *plain utterances* reveal his deceptions. . . . The last great delusion is soon to open before us. . . . So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.[3]

We have two alternatives: accommodate culture and compromise divine truth, or confront culture with divine truth. If we do not confront culture, the Seventh-day Adventist church will have little influence in holding back a further cultural decline. And if we do not uphold divine truth, we will have no saving influence on a world that has an appointment with the returning Christ.

Interrelated Issues

The issue we face is far greater than an argument among friends over the role of women in ministry. Francis Schaeffer has said what Adventists should be saying: "There are hard days ahead of us—for ourselves and for our . . . children. And without a strong view of Scripture as a foundation, we will not be ready for the hard days to come." Unless we allow the Bible to have full authority, "the next generation of Christians will have nothing on which to stand. Our . . . children will be left with the ground cut out from under them, with no foundation upon which to build their faith or their lives."[4]

Beneath the campaign to ordain women in ministry can be found a method of Bible interpretation that holds that the counsel of the apostle Paul prohibiting women from serving in a position

of ecclesiastical authority over men has been culturally conditioned and simply reflects rabbinic teachings which were decidedly male dominated and chauvinistic. Therefore, this view holds, the Bible must be deculturized in the same manner in which Rudolph Bultmann sought to demythologize it. But how does fallible man decide what principles are cultural and what revelational? Where does the process end? It is much safer, and more consistent with Adventist Bible interpretation, to take Paul at his inspired word than to trust the uninspired thoughts of men or women.

When Paul speaks, even when he uses the personal pronoun "I," such as in 1 Timothy 2:12, he is exercising his apostolic authority. He is not expressing a personal opinion that can be cast aside if it conflicts with contemporary cultural or social opinions. What he writes "is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14:37-38 RSV).

In light of that warning, one should think twice before twisting what Paul plainly says so that he appears to say what he does not say. The bottom line on the matter is drawn by Ellen White:

> It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be heeded so far as is consistent with the spirit of the times and our position in the world; it is another thing to regard it as it really is—the word of the living God, the word that is our life, the word that is to mold our actions, our words, and our thoughts. To hold God's word as anything less than this is to reject it. And this rejection by those who profess to believe it, is foremost among the causes of skepticism and infidelity in the youth.[5]

The question concerning the proper role of women in ministry is just the tip of an iceberg, beneath which lurks the far more serious issue of the inspiration of Scripture, the apostolic authority of Paul, and whether the church will listen to the voice of revelation in its interpretation of Scripture or to the voice of secular culture. The sources of our faith, Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, are always more reliable than the voices of our critics.

Adventism has always proclaimed reformation on the basis of Scripture, not on culture or any other basis. The fact is that if principles of

interpretation are right, we can have confidence in the doctrines that emerge from their careful application to the biblical text.

Safeguard

Throughout the amazing history of the Seventh-day Adventist church, the writings of Ellen G. White have served as a safeguard against the erosion of biblical authority that other denominations have been experiencing for the past 200 years. Listen to some of her words in relation to the authority of God's Word:

> Men in this age of the world act as if they were at liberty to question the words of the Infinite, to review His decisions and statutes, endorsing, revising, reshaping, and annulling, at their pleasure. If they cannot misconstrue, misinterpret, or alter God's plain decision, or bend it to please the multitude and themselves, they break it. We are never safe while we are guided by human opinions; but we are safe when we are guided by a "Thus saith the Lord." We cannot trust the salvation of our souls to any lower standard than the decision of an infallible Judge. Those who make God their guide, and his word their counselor, follow the lamp of life. God's living oracles guide their feet in straight paths. Those who are thus led do not dare judge the word of God, but ever hold that his word judges them. They get their faith and their religion from his word.[6]

In *Stranger In My Home* I stated that "The writings of Ellen G. White do not constitute a barricade across the road of Biblical studies and theological scholarship. Rather, they constitute a fence along both sides of the road of such inquiry to protect the church from veering away from the straight and narrow of God's revelation."[7] Two dangerous temptations face us: (1) we may climb over that fence to join the rest of the evangelical world, thus cutting ourselves off from our own spiritual roots, or (2) we may tear down the fence ourselves, which will allow an ecumenical interchange that can only lead to the same sort of doctrinal compromise engaged in by so many denominations since the end of World War II. In the

first case, the individual abandons the church outright and apostatizes from his former beliefs, but the church and its beliefs remains intact. The second seems a more attractive alternative for some. However, its consequences are the more dangerous because, while the individual remains within the fold of the church, the church's doctrines are corrupted.

What is at stake is the authority of the Bible itself. The Bible should be the fundamental norm on the basis of which the church makes decisions that order its faith and practice. It is not possible to contend for the faith with any hope of success or the blessing of God, without a determined and sound adherence to the full authority of the Word of God. Any builder knows that a building is only as strong as its foundation. To weaken the foundation is ultimately to destroy the building. A house built upon sand cannot stand. Jesus, speaking "as one who had authority," said,

> Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt. 7:24-27)

Without the full authority of the Bible, the Seventh-day Adventist church would go the way of many mainline denominations. Accepting principles of interpretation that would limit the Bible's authority would be extremely grave, rending the fabric of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It could no longer claim to "have the truth," if there were no solid foundation upon which its truth stood. No longer could we, on the basis of Scripture, claim the fallenness of other churches and the remnant purity of our own. No longer could we enthusiastically, and with assurance, wave the flag representing Bible truth. No longer could our evangelists urge converts to join us "in the truth."

Among the mainline Protestant churches, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is one of the last bastions holding to biblical absolutes. The resurgence and return to biblical authority within the Southern Baptist Convention is another encouraging example, though the road to that return has not been easy for our conservative Baptist friends.

The Seventh-day Adventist church historically has measured and tested ideas and issues on the basis of the Bible in order to ascertain what is true or false, what should be done and what avoided. Most Adventists want to continue to do so.

Have our presuppositions been changing, even without our knowing it? Adventists used to believe there were absolutes that would always be true and dependable, that could be counted on no matter what. If we can no longer measure faith, morals, ethics, by an objective absolute standard, everything is up for grabs. Biblical teaching is relativized and faith is subjectivized. Adventists historically have turned to the Bible for determining what is truth. Are we now turning to personal experience or to culture instead? Have we begun to lose confidence in the written Word to the point where we are ready to accept human experience as the basis of truth? Are we ready to ordain individuals to the gospel ministry on the authority of their sense of call or their claims to giftedness, rather than on the authority of the Word of God? Are Adventists beginning to "sacrifice the objective truths of Scripture on the altar of subjective experience"?[8]

Conclusion

Confessing adherence to the authority of the Bible is one thing; believing what it teaches is another. Is it possible to believe in an inspired Bible and at the same time conclude that Paul's counsel to Timothy concerning the role of women in ministry was in error? that his view on this matter was conditioned by a male-dominated culture and thus was mistaken? In actuality, is that not giving more authority to human reason and culture than to Scripture? For any Seventh-day Adventist willingly to compromise on the full authority of Scripture on any issue affecting faith, morals, and lifestyle is shocking.

The battle for the Bible and its interpretation has been waged for many decades and no doubt will continue until the second advent of Jesus Christ. But if a battle is to be fought, what better one to fight? To lose this battle is to lose all, as many denominations have tragically discovered. The inspired Word of God counsels the Christian:

> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:11-17)

So far we have discussed biblical authority and interpretation. We now turn more specifically to the role of women in ministry *in the light of* biblical authority and interpretation.

NOTES

1. Karl Heim, *God Transcendent* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 198-199.

2. Some are of the opinion that this text should be translated "All scripture that is inspired is useful . . . ." But such a rendering is unacceptable, as it contradicts 2 Peter 1:21 which states that "men spoke from God" completely under the motivation and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such a rendering would also make the interpreter, rather than the Bible itself, the final arbiter as to what in the Bible is or is not inspired and applicable. This effectively subverts the authority of the Bible as God's Word. It would be seen as merely a collection of humanity's most lofty ideas about God and religion.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 593, emphasis mine.

4. Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1984), pp. 46-47.

5. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), p. 260.

6. Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 21, 1899, p. 113.

7. C. Raymond Holmes, *Stranger In My Home* (Wakefield, Mich.: POINTER Publications, 1987), p. 89.

8. John Warwick Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1974), p. 13.

Chapter Five

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: ITS IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

There is no universal agreement within the Christian church at large as to whether or not women in ministry should be ordained, occupy the headship role of pastor and exercise spiritual leadership over men. Some Protestant denominations have ordained women for some time. But the practice is certainly not universal, nor can the fact that some denominations have adopted it be used as a valid and persuasive argument for a Bible-believing church to do so. Women's ordination has proven to be divisive. Many Bible-believing evangelical churches, and many theologians in other churches which do ordain women, continue to remain in opposition. Their arguments are not cultural but biblical and theological, as we shall see in the three denominational examples given later in this volume. These arguments have to do in large part with beliefs concerning the inspiration and authority of the Bible, as well as with methods of Bible interpretation. Those same examples will demonstrate that where there is a resurgence of biblical faith, there is also resistance to women's ordination as being contrary to the Bible's teaching.

Where did the trend toward women's ordination come from? Two factors are prominent, one social and the other theological.

The social factor includes the contemporary feminist movement which has had a major influence on this development and in which equal rights for women have been in the forefront. Also, changes in the western world have allowed women to move into jobs previously held only by men. The two world wars of the twentieth century contributed measurably, requiring women to work in defense industries and taking the place of men drafted into the military.

The theological factor is the contemporary divergence in the way the Bible is viewed and interpreted. For example, if it is assumed that Paul was writing only for his own day when he talks about male headship (1 Cor. 11:3, 11f.; Eph. 5:23), or when he says that the pastor should be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2), it could be concluded that were Paul alive today he would concur with the cultural pressure for women's ordination.

But would it not be even more logical to conclude that because Paul based his counsel concerning the matter of women exercising spiritual authority over men on the order of creation (1 Tim. 2:12-14), he would stick to that counsel were he alive today? The fact is that Jesus appointed no women apostles, and Paul, by virtue of his apostolic authority, prohibited women from exercising spiritual authority over men. This would indicate apostolic harmony and unity as Paul universally applied the principle established by Christ. An even more serious question for us today is, Do we trust Christ or not? If He is the Head of the church, should we not allow Him, through the inspired Word, to determine the specifications for ministry and how the church and its ministry functions? The message of Christ cannot be separated from the history of Christ. The biblical record of His life and ministry reveals God's decision to incarnate Himself as male. The Bible presents Him to us as the second Adam, as Prophet, Priest, and King, all masculine images. To say that His gender is irrelevant to His ministry, and to all ministry, is to separate the biblical message from biblical history.

Cultural Basis?

The major question which needs to be asked is: Is the intense pressure to ordain women based more on cultural factors than on a regard for full biblical authority?

The fact that there is an organized and financed campaign in the Seventh-day Adventist church promoting the ordination of women is not alarming in itself. Because of the interrelation of this issue and secular feminism we will probably have it with us for some time. What is alarming are the means employed by some proponents in seeking that end, including the kind of Bible interpretation that if applied to all our

doctrines would take us in a direction we dare not go.

Critics of historical-critical and deculturizing methods of Bible interpretation are being vindicated by events. One major Protestant body which, on the basis of the cultural conditioning principle, has been ordaining women pastors for some years is now supporting homosexual congregations on the basis of that same principle.[1] Some Adventists have assured this author that the Seventh-day Adventist church would never do so. But one can have no confidence in such assurances, because to adopt the cultural conditioning principle of Bible interpretation is to fling wide the theological door. It can happen in the Seventh-day Adventist church, and it will happen unless vigilance is maintained. In fact, the campaign for support of homosexual lifestyle has already begun in our ranks.[2]

Enthusiasts repeat that no further steps are likely. Yet human history vividly demonstrates that further steps inevitably follow. It is in the nature of humanity. Often proponents of change are vehement in their appeal to religious freedom, and those who oppose them are criticized for bringing the Bible to bear on issues. People who view the ordination of women, and homosexual lifestyle, as human rights will judge their opponents to be morally wrong and reactionary for making a distinction between a human right and the will of God.

Those who oppose the ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist church on biblical grounds must not allow proponents to control the terms of the debate. Focusing on a piece of truth, magnifying it until it effectively cancels out or distorts what is the whole truth, is dangerous. For example, religious liberty does not cancel the will of God. The believer is free but not to do what the Word of God forbids. Galatians 3:26-28 does not cancel 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 3:1-7. We dare not quote the Bible to subvert its own truth.

In American culture we live in the midst of perpetual discontent. C. S. Lewis once observed that liberal Christianity could never convert the heathen, as it was a way out, not a way in.

Women in Ministry

Another question needs to be asked in all biblical fairness and sensitivity: Is there a valid and necessary ministry for women?

The answer to this last question, of course, is yes. That answer is based on Scripture and on Adventist history which can point to the ministry of Ellen G. White, as well as to the fruitful ministries of many faithful and dedicated women Bible-workers and colporteurs.

It does not take much study of the Bible to conclude that women have played important roles in holy history, many of them prominent in ministry. Furthermore, the history of Christianity bears witness to the fact that much congregational life revolves around the dedication of faithful and sacrificing women. Many a pastor will testify that if it were not for women there would be no congregational life. By virtue of baptism all members of the Body of Christ, the church, regardless of gender, are ministers of the gospel.

However, as far as an official ministry for women is concerned, the New Testament gives no strong evidence, for instance, that there was an organization in the early church called deaconesses. Not until about the third century do references to such an organization appear in the writings of the church fathers. But there are many references to women engaged in some forms of ministry. Acts 21:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 indicate that there were women prophets in the early church. But prophets are distinguished from pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11, because prophesy results from more direct inspiration. Such prophetic inspiration provided the basis for the kind of exhortation to which Ellen White was called. Apparently a woman who exercised the gift of prophecy was the exception and not the rule. Women were called by God to minister as prophets but not as elders or pastors. Why? Because a prophet is a messenger and God communicates His will through men and women prophets, irrespective of gender. But a priest/elder/pastor is in a spiritual leadership role, representative of God the Father to the congregation. The Bible does not present a female as a symbol of that paternal representation of headship.

The reasons why women were not ordained as priests, apostles, elders or pastors are not socio-cultural or sexist but theological, having to do with the order and manner of creation. The Bible clearly teaches that men and women are equal in nature and worth before God by virtue of creation and redemption (Gen. 1:27;

Gal. 3:28), yet they are different in function. Men were created to function as fathers and women as mothers in cooperation, not independently of each other.

Many of Paul's co-workers in ministry were women. Priscilla was apparently well educated and an apt instructor in the new faith (Rom. 16:3, Acts 18:26). Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis all "worked very hard in the Lord" (Rom. 16:6, 12). Junia, who suffered imprisonment with Paul, received his commendation (Rom. 16:7).[3] Other women in ministry mentioned in the New Testament include Mary and Martha, Phoebe, Lois, Eunice, Euodia, and Syntyche. Of these, Euodia and Syntyche in particular were a great help to Paul; he pled with the Philippian congregation to "help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel" (4:3). Tabitha carried on a significant ministry for the needy (Acts 9:36).

In spite of the fact that woman was created last, suggesting that she was the crowning act of creation; in spite of the fact that God did not restrict the prophetic office or judgeships to men, and thus there were prophetesses (Ex. 15:20), one of whom was also a judge of Israel (Judges 4:4); in spite of the fact that women were the first to be told of the Lord's resurrection and first to be commanded to tell others (John 20:16, Luke 24:22-23); in spite of the fact that a woman named Anna is identified as a prophetess who proclaimed the gospel (Luke 2:38), and that Priscilla was one of Paul's fellow workers in spreading the gospel (Acts 18:26); in spite of that "direction," an indisputable fact is that *Jesus did not appoint one female apostle.* That fact cannot be explained away by saying it was to be expected in the social context of the first century. If the appeal is to culture, and if the social context of Bible times allowed for women to serve as prophetesses and even to preach the gospel, would it not be logical to assume that it would also allow for women as apostles? If society did not prohibit women from serving as prophetesses and preachers, why did Jesus choose only men as apostles? The answer is that He was not guided by culture or custom in His sovereign decision. His decision in this matter was based on principles having their origin in creation. Neither the culture of Bible times, nor that of our own times, can be appealed to as supporting the ordination of women in ministry.

Jesus was not a wimp. He defied prevailing cultural customs on more than one occasion for the sake of a divine principle. If the prevailing culture of His day was anti-women, discriminatory and unjust, and if under such circumstances the primary concern of Jesus relative to women was justice, He would certainly have defied culture and appointed some women apostles.

Women in Church and Society

There was a great difference between the position of women in the society of the early church and that of women in Greek and Roman society. The Christian insistence on the purity and inviolability of the marriage covenant was a tribute not only to God's will but to the value of both men and women. Judaism by the time of Jesus supported a husband's right to divorce his wife for almost any reason. Jesus condemned that practice and insisted that divorce was acceptable only when unfaithfulness, as represented by adultery, was committed (Matt. 5:31-32). Even then divorce was only the last recourse, reconciliation being a fundamental principle of the gospel.

The biblical view is that Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (1 Cor. 11:3), man is the glory of God while woman is the glory of man, and woman was created for man (11:7-9). In marriage the husband is the head of the wife in the same way that Christ is head of the church (Eph. 5:23). The principle established is that church leadership resides in Christ who is the Head, and in a Christian marriage leadership resides in the husband who is the head of the wife. Those who do not wish to submit to God's will regarding leadership in a Christian marriage, be they male or female, may exercise freedom of choice and remain unmarried. Should they choose the unmarried state the biblical principle of celibacy and virginity must also be maintained by the baptized disciple of Christ. Marriage brings with it certain duties and obligations under God, while the single life also has its duties and obligations under God.

The Scriptures define the woman's role in relation to her husband as that of "help" or "helper" (Gen. 2:18). The Hebrew suggests that she is to fulfill a role appropriate to her husband's needs—a complementary role, which is far more than simply

companionship. He needs her help, not just her presence. While they are equals in the sight of God, she can best help her husband by encouraging him to exercise his headship role in the family and to fulfill his obligations as a man. Ideally, her personal goals are in submission to his and will find fulfillment only in relation to his. Acceptance of this role does not make her inferior to her husband but faithful to God. The same principle applies to the husband as he relates to his wife. She needs his unfailing and tender love in order to be submissive and to fulfill her obligations as a woman.

It is evident that in God's economy men and women do have special "places" or roles, designed for them in love by their Creator. Honoring God's design applies equally to men and women; it is not a case of the "superior" male keeping the "inferior" female in her place. It is, rather, a matter of allowing God to determine the roles, and both men and women accepting His plan in faith and obedience, which does not always come easily. It is not usually truth itself that is resisted but submission to the truth, especially if a vested interest is at stake.

The love of the husband for his wife exercised in headship, and the love of the wife for her husband exercised in submission, are symbolic of the relationship that should exist between Christ (groom) and the church (bride) (Eph. 5:22-33). Christ is the Head; the true church, made up of men and women, is distinguished by its submission to Him. In practice, this meant that the early church took seriously the principle of male and female role distinctions.

While the will of God concerning the relationship between male and female, especially within the marriage covenant, has a broad aspect and covers all society, it is especially pertinent to the church. No matter what society in general may do, the church is obligated to uphold and maintain the will of God in this and all other matters.

Special Ministry of Women Imperative

No statement by Ellen G. White has been found supporting ordination of women to the headship role in congregational leadership or ecclesiastical authority. Rather, Mrs. White consistently

upholds for women the primary role of motherhood and the nurturing of godly children.

But a wider ministry is also open to women. Mrs. White strongly encouraged some women to "labor in the gospel ministry." Her call was explicit: "There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God."[4] "The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. . . . The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed."[5]

This labor was not to be all volunteer, either. In 1898 Mrs. White called for women who devoted their full time to the gospel work to be paid fairly for their labors, though they were not ordained:

> The ministers are paid for the work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and if she devotes her time and her strength to visiting from family to family, opening the Scriptures to them, although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Should her labors be counted as nought, and her husband's salary be no more than that of the servant of God whose wife does not give herself to the work, but remains at home to care for her family? . . .
>
> This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carry the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot. The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men. They should not be compelled by the sentiments and rules of others to depend upon donations for their payment, any more than should the ministers.[6]

This work was not to consist only of doctrinal instruction, but of a nurturing ministry to emotional and physical needs as well. The instruction quoted above ends with this paragraph:

> Those women who labor to teach souls to seek for the new birth in Christ Jesus, are doing a precious work. They consecrate themselves to God, and they are just as verily laborers for God as are their husbands. They can enter families to which ministers could find no access. They can listen to the sorrows of the depressed and oppressed. They can shed rays of light into discouraged souls. They can pray with them. They can open the Scriptures, and enlighten them from a "Thus saith the Lord."[7]

In these and many other statements, Mrs. White called for women to do a personal work with individuals and families in the home. Women would be far more able than men to reach hearts, provide practical counsel and training, and to open the Scriptures, especially to other women and to youth. Today, the devastating increase of divorces, single parents, drug addicted youth, and child abuse, as well as the widespread need for appealing, personal Bible instruction, makes this special ministry of trained and dedicated women imperative, a word that is not too strong in light of Mrs. White's instruction in 1903, repeating and strengthening her 1898 words:

> This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carrying the truth into families. . . . The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor *by women*. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men.[8]

According to Mrs. White, such women are not only needed, but God has appointed them. To the extent that we have ignored this counsel, the work has suffered loss and we have refused to acknowledge what "the Lord has settled." By failing to support the work of

Bible instructors and qualified women counselors on pastoral staffs, we have blunted our outreach; by treating as unimportant what God called essential, we have affronted God. Yet while we ignore what God *has* called us to do about the ministry of women, some would have us channel the talents of women into the regular pastoral ministry, where God has *not* given us such direction. Then, for the sake of a supposed equality, they would have us ordain them. In the light of God's counsel, the issue of the proper role of women in ministry is vital to us today.

Though we have spoken mostly of paid ministry, let no one think that this is the only ministry that counts. Ellen White made this remarkable statement about lay ministry for women and men:

> Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon men and women of the church, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness.[9]

Though this striking statement regarding lay ministry has been taken out of context and misused to argue for ordination of women as ministers, it needs to be examined closely and taken very seriously. It reveals the shallowness of arguments which claim that, by not ordaining women to the gospel ministry, the church shuts out more than half of its membership from participating in the gospel proclamation. It recognizes both the importance of women in the work of

the church and the supportive role of women in this work. Women are to be encouraged in ministry, yet their responsibility is not equated here with that of the male ministers who hold the office of spiritual headship in local congregations. Theirs is a unique role, as important as, but different in function than, that of men.

Mrs. White's counsel is based on Bible evidence and authority. Whether God is calling women to ministry is not the issue. The church would put itself in an untenable position were it to fail to recognize God's call to women and refuse to accept them in ministry, whether professional or lay. Having said that, however, the question we face is, to what ministry are women being called? Mrs. White was quite specific. Personal soul-winning ministry was her primary concern. "There are women who are especially adapted for the work of giving Bible readings, and they are very successful in presenting the Word of God in its simplicity to others."[10] As we have seen, Mrs. White also called for women to serve in a counseling, helping ministry to other women and families. And she endorsed the commission of women to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor.

It is obvious that Mrs. White considered such work gospel ministry, whether performed by professionals full-time or on a more limited scale by volunteers. Within these parameters there is more than enough for women in ministry to do. The vast fields of spiritual nurture, with their great demands, are open and waiting. This ministry is more maternal than paternal, and is complementary to, and supportive of, the ministry of the male pastor. Furthermore, it utilizes the unique nature and abilities of woman. Partnership in ministry is thus upheld and encouraged. In fact, it would enhance total ministry when the "helper" role of Genesis 2:18 is maintained.

Preaching on the part of women in ministry is not excluded, provided that their preaching gifts are supportive and complementary of the male pastor's preaching. As long as it is recognized that the authority is his to delegate in fulfillment of his headship role and her submissive role, the injunction of 1 Timothy 2:12—"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent"—is met. Women in ministry are to be "silent" in reference to exercising or usurping spiritual "authority over" men.

Performing such ministries does not require ordination to the office of spiritual headship, though women should be "appointed" and "set apart" in an official way "by the laying on of hands." Not all laying on of hands is for spiritual headship: in the rites of baby dedication and anointing of the sick, for instance, it does not symbolize being set apart by the church for the specific role and function of authoritative leadership, nor would it do so for women in this instance. However, a trained, qualified woman appointed to a ministerial staff should be paid a just salary according to the denomination's salary structure for ministry, including all fringe benefits.

Most evangelical churches have only two alternatives before them: either to ordain or not ordain women. But God has blessed the Seventh-day Adventist church, through the counsel of Ellen G. White, with another alternative—that of training and appointing qualified women for specific ministerial responsibilities and publicly recognizing such appointment by a special dedicatory service.

Conclusion

Beyond question the role of women in society and church is under scrutiny today. To no small degree this reality can be attributed to the feminist movement. No sensitive thinking person would deny that there are many things that need to be addressed and redressed, such as social and economic equality, equal opportunity, equal pay for equal work, sexual abuse and harassment, and the unfounded idea that men are superior and women inferior. The Word of God obligates Seventh-day Adventist Christians to join in the struggle to eliminate such abuse, but they cannot participate in the dismantling of the social and ecclesiastical structure that God has established.

There has been a tendency to label as anti-woman those who oppose ordination for women. But such labeling is unwarranted and may reveal a failure to wrestle with the underlying scriptural concerns of those opposed—such as role distinctions, the order of creation, male headship and female submission in home and church. The best course for people on both sides of the ordination issue is to carefully study anew the counsel that God has given this church regarding the role of women in ministry.

Finally, the issue at stake is not whether women are being called by God to ministry, nor whether that call should be recognized by the church in appointing them and setting them apart, but whether or not they should be ordained to the headship office of congregational leadership. *What the Word of God teaches* concerning ministry and the roles of men and women in society and church ought to be primary rather than what might be considered to be accepted social custom. The temptation to bend the Word of God to suit human wishes and desires must always be resisted by any church claiming to stand on Scripture.

NOTES

1. This is in defiance of 1 Cor. 6:9-10: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." (RSV)

2. See *SDA Kinship Connection*, published by Seventh-day Adventist Gay Men and Women and Their Friends, P. O. Box 3480, Los Angeles, CA 90078-3840. *Kinship Connection* is not just an appeal for understanding and ministry. It actively promotes homosexuality, even "promiscuous" homosexuality, as a valid alternative lifestyle among Adventists and urges its acceptance in the church without transformation.

3. While the Greek in Romans 16:7 may be ambiguous, the weight of New Testament evidence is on the side of rejecting the idea that the woman Junia mentioned there was an apostle. There is no New Testament evidence that the man Andronicus mentioned in the same text was an apostle. The most plausible and biblically consistent understanding is that both Andronicus and Junia were well known and appreciated by the apostles as Christian converts prior to Paul's own conversion.

4. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), p. 472.

5. Ibid., pp. 464-465.

6. Ellen G. White Manuscript Release #330, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, pp. 323, 325.

7. Ibid., p. 327.

8. *Evangelism*, p. 493. I have italicized the words "by women" to highlight the fact that Mrs. White added them to the 1898 wording, making the 1903 statement unmistakably explicit that women are called to do "this kind of labor."

9. Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 9, 1895, p. 434. The article, entitled "The Duty of the Minister and the People," calls for ministers to train, empower and encourage the church members—women as well as men—

to participate in the work of spreading the gospel message. The book *Evangelism* also has many statements regarding the work that women may do though they are not employed by the church. See pp. 456-495, where these are intermingled with references to women who work full-time for the church. The essential point is that *every* church member, man or woman, is called to be a worker, a missionary, for Christ. This privilege is not reserved only for the paid or for the ordained.

10. *Evangelism*, p. 469.

Chapter Six

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: ITS FEMINIST IDEOLOGY

The drive for women's ordination cannot be separated from the feminist movement. Feminism involves much more than the status of women in society, as we shall see. Its effects reach profoundly into the realm of religion. Therefore, the Christian church must challenge feminist claims that are not in harmony with the Bible, as well as respond sensitively to genuine social inequities.

The feminist movement in general is divided into two camps, radical secular feminism and Christian feminism.[1] Christian feminism itself can be divided into two distinct groups: (1) Those who reject the Bible as normative, and (2) those who subscribe to the authority of the Bible. Most proponents of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church are in this latter group, which we might call biblical feminists in that they subscribe to biblical authority, though in many instances they interpret the Bible in such a way as to limit its authority.[2] Opponents of women's ordination, on the other hand, are concerned that the Bible be interpreted in such a way that it is allowed full authority.

For the church as a social institution, ordination is the first item on the feminist agenda. Other items on the agenda are the reinterpretation of the Bible, the reconstruction of history, and the campaign for inclusive language, which is an attempt to purge our minds of non-feminist ways of thinking. Feminist reinterpretation and reconstruction have been underway for some time and have affected many denominations. The radical feminist challenge is, "We women are going to bring an end to God. . . . We will change the world so much that he won't fit in anymore."[3]

The goals of feminism and the drive for women's ordination intersect where the traditional understanding of the Bible and the Christian concept of history are challenged. Some perceptive thinkers have issued warnings to Christians who may be tempted to accept the presuppositions of feminism. One such warning proclaims,

> *Feminism is a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God's role for women.* Those who adopt any part of its lifestyle can't help picking up its philosophy. And those who pick up its philosophy are buying themselves a one-way ticket to social anarchy.[4]

Much could be written concerning Christian feminism, but we will consider the three most critical aspects that have major influence on the women's ordination issue: reinterpretation of the Bible, reconstruction of history, and gender-inclusive language.

Reinterpretation of the Bible

In order to understand the danger posed by the feminist movement, we must first be alerted as to how feminists interpret the Bible.

Though she is not a Seventh-day Adventist, Susan T. Foh articulated the danger facing our church and many other Christian churches:

> [Feminists claim that] the culture of Biblical times was patriarchal and the men who wrote the Bible were inextricably influenced by their culture. That is why Paul sometimes places women in a subordinate position. Therefore, the biblical feminists reason, we must remove cultural elements from the Bible and recover God's truth; we must deculturize the Bible.[5]

This means that in order to "correctly" understand the Bible's meaning for today, every element that is representative of patriarchal culture is to be discounted in interpretation, because such elements contribute to the oppression of women. The whole image

of God as Father is repugnant to many feminists, and they react with hostility to traditional biblical language. To accept the biblical view of God as Father, they hold, is to confirm the domination of patriarchal society. This extreme view is represented by the statement "If God is male, then male is God."[6] Some might even say that a new translation of the Bible is needed, from which all such patriarchal elements would be removed. What is left would then be considered the pure Word of God. In other words, remove from the Bible those elements which are not appreciated and that run counter to feminist presuppositions and the demands of contemporary culture. *The practical consequence would be that contemporary culture would have more authority than the inspired biblical text.* This in turn would have major implications regarding the kind of lives we would live, having virtually thrown away the Scriptures by radically changing them.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, one of the most articulate of Christian feminists and often quoted as an authority by proponents of women's ordination, admits that "the interpretation of Scripture is central" to women's ordination and gender roles. However, she has adopted an attitude of suspicion rather than acceptance of biblical authority and suggests that the Bible functions "less as a classic than as a constitution . . . of an ongoing community." The Bible is not to be "looked upon as a set of laws but rather as a set of interpretive practices that provide basic paradigms of Christian identity."[7] It can be amended and changed to suit the temper of the times.

Fiorenza is compelled to view the Bible in this way because her basic presupposition is that the Bible is the product of patriarchal culture and is, therefore, male dominated (androcentric). Consequently she draws the conclusion that "the Bible has played a key role in the argument against women's emancipation."[8] In her view, if the Bible is to be retained in any form by the contemporary church, it requires a feminist interpretation that is "corrective" and which will determine what is usable from the past and what should be discarded. To accomplish such a reinterpretation, a critical, skeptical approach is needed in which the so-called patriarchal domination of the biblical material is analyzed, isolated, and

discounted when it comes to interpretation and contemporary application. The task becomes to

> find ways to break the silence of the [biblical] text. . . . Rather than understand the text as an adequate reflection of the reality about which it speaks, we must search for *clues and allusions that indicate the reality about which the text is silent.*[9]

Fiorenza advocates an imaginative rewriting of the Bible story from the feminist perspective, in order to help discover the "reality" about which it is silent. In an imaginary letter from "Phoebe, an apostle," composed by one of Fiorenza's students, is found this interesting interchange in which Paul himself reduces his own inspired writings to the level of "ramblings"!

> I shudder to think that sometime in the future a leader of one of the churches will say, "Gentiles, slaves, and women cannot become part of the ministry of the Word because Jesus did not entrust the apostolic charge to them." When I said that to Paul, he laughed uproariously and exclaimed, "Phoebe, you are a person with the strangest notions! If any of my letters do survive, only someone bewitched will fail to see the difference between my preaching of the Good News and my ramblings about cultural problems and situations.[10]

In Fiorenza's view, what is valid in the Bible is what is in accord with the Christian community's understanding of its own identity in a given time and place. Because this identity involves culture, contemporary culture becomes the norm and biblical faith becomes relative. So if the church of the 1990s in North America sees the ordination of women as part of its self-identity, biblical prohibitions can be discounted. The reader of the text is not an interpreter but becomes part of the interpretation itself. And the reader exercises greater influence on the interpretation than does the biblical text.

Feminists are of the opinion that Christianity can survive the fundamental changes that they feel are necessary in the life of the church in this century. Their opinion is based on the premise that

religious faith is whatever a confessing group of people defines it to be. In other words, the Christian faith is not a *revealed* religion. It is, rather, the human product of the believing community. This premise determines the feminist view of the Bible as fallible and, consequently, requires the interpretive principle of skepticism when reading it.

Feminists hold that whatever can be attributed to patriarchal cultural conditioning is not authoritative. They claim that the Bible cannot be interpreted objectively, insisting that a radical reinterpretation is necessary which would preserve feminist perspectives. The feminist viewpoint from which all Bible texts are seen is that of female oppression. "Passages of Scripture that do not say what the contemporary reader determines to be true from a feminist perspective are simply not accepted as 'biblical revelation and truth.'"[11] Is this objective or subjective interpretation? Feminists do not hesitate to be radically subjective when being so suits their purpose.

The modern historical parallel to deculturization of the Bible is the demythologization Rudolph Bultmann proposed some decades ago in order to appeal to modern scientific and secular minds. For him the six-day creation, the virgin birth of Christ, His resurrection and ascension, His second advent, the resurrection of believers and all miracles, were "myths" which modern man cannot accept and which therefore should be removed from Scriptural teaching. Deculturization takes a similar position in asserting that all "myths" such as male headship, female submission, and male-female role distinctions should be considered irrelevant in the light of contemporary culture. The error of both demythologization and deculturization is that human reason sits in judgment upon Scripture.

Feminists will point to the New Testament account of Jesus washing His disciples' feet (John 13:1-17) as an example of cultural conditioning, concluding that footwashing does not have timeless and universal value. Though it appears only in the Gospel of John, Seventh-day Adventists have insisted that the footwashing incident does have timeless and universal value.

The feminist approach would also conclude that Sabbath observance on the seventh day of the week was conditioned by Jewish culture, and hence it is without timeless value and universal application. Again, Seventh-day Adventists have insisted on the timeless

value and universal application of seventh-day Sabbath observance. In order for Adventists to remain consistent, they cannot discount, on the basis of cultural conditioning, Paul's teaching concerning the roles of men and women in society and church. To do so would ultimately prove destructive to other doctrines vital to Adventism.

Furthermore, feminists discount Paul's appeal to creation (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13-14) for his views on the roles of men and women. One of them questions

> whether a reference to creation makes Paul's teachings about women any more universally or permanently binding than is the Sabbath command, which is certainly part of the creation order. In fact, one might argue that the latter is even more foundational because it is part of the basic seven-day structure of the creation. Yet it is argued from the New Testament, with relatively few dissenters, that the Sabbath need not be observed now in the same way that it had been.... If one is considering *order* in creation, the sequence of days and the matter of the Sabbath certainly must not be overlooked. The concept of the Sabbath is found throughout Scripture. Hebrews 4:1-11 bases the idea of a Christian "rest" on the creation order of the Sabbath. At the same time Jesus characteristically considered human need above the observance of the Sabbath. Yet Luke, emphasizing, as he often did, the fact that Jesus and the early Christians were faithful Jews, made a point of the fact that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath "as was his custom" (Luke 4:16). The point is made even more strongly when Luke writes that after the crucifixion the women went home to prepare spices, "But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). It is certainly appropriate to ask, therefore, whether it is not hermeneutically proper to conclude that a reference can be made in Scripture to the order of creation to support a *particular* action without such a reference implying that the action must be repeated *universally* and *permanently*."[12]

This lengthy quote claims that because most churches do not see the seventh-day Sabbath as timeless and universally applicable,

though they recognize it as part of the order of creation, neither should Paul's teaching about women be seen as timeless and universally applicable, though he appeals to the order of creation. But Adventists cannot accept this kind of argumentation. We must be consistent and reject the argument both in reference to the seventh-day Sabbath and the ordination of women.

The historic Adventist interpretation is that *because* the seventh-day Sabbath is part of the order of creation, it has timeless value and is universally applicable. On the basis of the same principle, when Paul appeals to the order of creation for his teaching about women, what he says must be taken seriously as having timeless value and universal applicability. Any other interpretation would be inconsistent for Adventists. This becomes a serious matter indeed, for if Adventists were to accept the feminist interpretation, it would have to be applied to all our doctrines. The price paid would be the end of historic Adventism.

Feminists hold that obedience to a biblical principle may result in a different kind of action today from that required in Bible times. For example, on the basis of the principle that women should not do anything in public that is culturally unacceptable, one should conclude that if contemporary culture accepts women in the pastoral role they should not be denied. The same argument is used in support of homosexual lifestyle.

On the basis of this kind of reasoning, evangelicals would be right and Adventists wrong when it comes to Sabbath-Sunday questions. The cultural argument would be accepted as authoritative and would prevail over the biblical data. Should Adventists conclude that obedience to a Bible principle, such as Sabbath observance, may result in a different kind of response today, the biblical detail of *seventh-day* observance would become irrelevant.

The feminist approach to Bible interpretation can be summarized in the following manner: because the Bible was written in a patriarchal culture, it is prejudiced against women's rights; the Bible is filled with human error, contradicts itself, and is limited in authority. Therefore, the task of interpretation is to discover just how ancient culture influences the intermix of revelation and human counsel so as to discern what is truth for our time.

If the biblical text cannot be depended upon for guidance, the only authority left is human imagination and reason operating from the feminist perspective.

Reconstruction of History

Feminism simply does not accept the Bible's record of events as true history. It claims that the Bible does *"not tell us how it actually was but how its religious significance was understood."* Furthermore, the view that the Bible is true history is considered unscientific and unsupported by the historical-critical method of interpretation.

> Jesus instituted the church, ordained the twelve, and determined the institutional forms of the church. The apostles continued the mission and work of Jesus, and their message in turn is codified in the New Testament as Holy Scripture. All later developments are predicated on God's revelation in Scripture, and the true church has never deviated from the apostolic tradition. *However, such an ideological construct of early Christian beginnings is no longer scientifically acceptable and is theologically destructive of the self-identity of Christian women who, according to this portrayal of early Christian development, were members but not leaders within the church.*[13]

How, then, does feminism read and interpret biblical history? The facts, the data, are not enough by themselves but must be united with the vision (imagination) of the interpreter, who then goes beyond the data to "intellectual re-creation." This is wishful thinking, carefully choosing some of the information the Bible gives and reconstructing the history according to what one wishes had happened. What is imagined becomes reality. In fact, this is far more than wishful thinking—it is a revolutionary departure from the traditional Christian interpretation of Scripture. If adopted, it will radically alter Christian doctrine.

Applying the method of historical reconstruction, how does the feminist interpret 1 Timothy 3:2, "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife"? Acceptable data are: "the

overseer," understood to mean bishop/pastor/elder, because that role is desirable for women, and "above reproach," because women are considered spiritually accountable in that role. Non-acceptable is the identification of the overseer as a "husband," which clearly implies male gender. So, "husband of one wife" is simply eliminated and ignored, because it does not fit the reconstruction. It is wished away. The feminist interpreter simply pretends it's not there!

The reconstruction of the Christian concept of God is one of the outcomes of feminist Bible interpretation and reconstruction of history. As one feminist put it,

> The sexist bias of patriarchal theology . . . . must be evaluated as blasphemous ratification of sin in God's name. . . . Feminist theology engages in a systematic reconstruction of all the symbols of human relation to God to delegitimize sexist bias and to manifest an authentic vision of redemption as liberation from sexism.[14]

When it is proclaimed from an Adventist pulpit that denying ordination to women in ministry is a sin against Galatians 3:28, whose thinking is being parroted? It could just as easily be proclaimed that to ordain women in spite of 1 Timothy 3:2 is sin. We must be careful as to what we define as sin. It would be sin to prohibit women in ministry at all, for God is certainly calling them, as Ellen G. White indicates. But it is not sin for any church to obey the Bible's injunction that the person holding spiritual leadership over a congregation must be a male, "the husband of one wife."

Gender-Inclusive Language

The deculturizing principle of Bible interpretation grows naturally out of the presupposition that the writers of the Bible, and therefore the Bible's language, were gender-biased. What happens, then, when this presupposition and this principle are applied to the translation of the Bible?

The most recent example of attempting to produce a gender inclusive version is the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV),

published under the auspices of the National Council of Churches. Operating on the premise that the original languages of the Bible are gender-biased, the translators of the NRSV felt free to take liberties with those languages. What was produced, therefore, is not really a *translation* but an *interpretation.*

Feminism freely admits that "some [Bible] texts . . . . support the agenda of human liberation and reject the cultural oppression of women" [such as Gal. 3:28], and that these texts "form the core of a feminist 'working canon,' and undergird the reformist attempts to recover a usable biblical tradition for women and others who share their concerns."[15] This means that there is a Bible within the Bible, elements feminists consider authoritative embedded in passages in which there are elements not accepted as authoritative. Here are a few examples.

The first part of Deut. 32:18 is translated in the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) as "You were unmindful of the Rock that *begot* you," while the NRSV translates it "You were unmindful of the Rock that *bore* you." Concerning this translation a feminist applauds, "Here the NRSV translation is clearly superior, as it brings out the nuances of the birthing imagery in the Hebrew, which refers to women's role in the process."[16] This is wishful thinking and feminist reinterpretation. The fact is that both the noun "Rock" and the verb "begot" in the original Hebrew are in the masculine form.[17] The NRSV is certainly not "superior" in its faithfulness to the original language in this case. The feminist sees what he or she wants to see, not what is required by the Hebrew.

The NRSV translates 1 Cor. 13:11, "when I became an *adult*, I put an end to childish ways." The Greek term translated "adult" is *aner*, which literally means a man, a male. Why has such liberty been taken in translation? Because "the committee has recognized that when the much beloved 1 Cor. 13 is read or heard in faith, the 'I' of the text becomes not simply Paul, but every reader and hearer."[18] In other words, the important thing is not what the text *says* but how it is *heard*; how it is heard is more authoritative than what it says. It is obvious that the NRSV "loses some of its more literal translation by its removal of male-oriented language."[19] The assumption that this is an improvement is highly debatable.

The campaign for gender-inclusive language prohibits any word suspected of implying sexism, such as a generic "he" or "his." Many good words that begin or end with "man," such as "mankind" and "chairman," produce scowls of indignation. Such language is offensive to women whose consciousness has been raised by feminist propaganda. If the feminists have their way, we will lose the freedom to choose words. It will soon be grammatically *incorrect* to use pronouns and generic nouns as we have in the past. This may appear to be inconsequential, but it is not, because language is the primary human medium of communication. The strategy is accurately described in the following:

> If you want to undercut an opponent's argument, simply compromise his language. This is done best by stealing your opponent's words and making them your own.... By stealing his language, you have stolen the verbal flags and banners around which he can rally people to his cause. Without those flags and banners he is speechless. By pilfering his verbal arsenal, you have left him without weapons and without defense. This is precisely what the feminist word thieves are trying to do.... In much the same way that weasels suck the content out of eggs, the feminists suck out all the content of words. Then they go the weasels one better. Rather than leave the empty shell of a word behind them after they have emptied it of its native meaning, they proceed to refill that mangled word with *a definition of their own choosing.*[20]

A recently published collection of Bible texts for reading in worship services throughout the year has substituted inclusive language for God.[21] In place of "Father" it uses "Father and Mother." "Lord," because it has masculine connotations, is replaced by "Sovereign." "Son of God" is replaced by "Child of God." "Human One" replaces "Son of Man." Because "king" is masculine, "kingdom" is replaced by "realm." When a man's name is mentioned, a woman's name is added, even though it is not in the original text: "We have Abraham as our Father *and Sarah and Hagar as our mothers*" (Matt. 3:9). John 1:18 reads, "We have beheld the Word's glory, glory as of the only Child from the Father *and*

Mother." But it should be obvious that "Father and Mother" does not say or mean the same thing as "Father." The use of such language legitimizes the idea of both "God" and "Goddess," and by so doing it perverts biblical religion. We need to be aware of the implications of such substitute language while at the same time recognizing the distinction between choosing among synonyms and adding to or deleting from the original biblical text. In any case, the above examples certainly demonstrate the extremes to which feminists are prepared to go in promoting their agenda.

Two passages in the Old Testament compare God to a mother (Isa. 49:14-15; 66:13). But those references have to do with *comparison*, not *essential being*. They do not alter the predominantly masculine references to God as Father throughout the Bible.[22] The image of God as masculine was not changed by Jesus, who always spoke of God as Father (as in Matt. 6:9; John 17).

Departure from Bible Teaching

The feminist agenda includes the reinterpretation of the Bible, the reconstruction of history, and the related drive for inclusive language. Proponents of women's ordination who base their arguments on equality ought to listen to what feminists themselves are saying, as the following statement points out:

> As a psychologist of religion, I do not agree that improving the position of women is a minor alteration in Judeo-Christian doctrine. . . . When feminists succeed in changing the positions of women in Christianity and Judaism, they will shake these religions at their roots. The nature of a religion lies in the nature of the symbols and images it exalts in ritual and doctrine. . . . The psychology of the Jewish and Christian religions depends on the masculine image that these religions have of their God. Feminists change the major psychological impact of Judaism and Christianity when they recognize women as religious leaders and as images of divinity. . . . *[V]ery few of the women and men now working for sexual equality in Christianity and Judaism realize the extent of their heresy.*[23]

This author frankly calls what Christian feminists are doing "the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh."

The feminist movement is robbing women of their God-given role in home and church, and proponents of women's ordination have unwittingly fallen into the trap. If women are hindered from being women, they will want to be men, or at least to do what men do. Feminism is working overtime to abolish the traditional role of woman as homemaker by brainwashing the unsuspecting into believing that denying them absolute freedom is unjust. Feminism would lead us all into thinking that to depart from clear Bible teaching is in harmony with the Bible, using Galatians 3:28 as the overriding principle.

In many instances the church is capitulating to culture, has swallowed the feminist propaganda hook, line, and sinker, and is now in the process of reinterpreting what the Bible says about role distinctions. It is abdicating its responsibility to uphold the Bible's teaching that women and men have roles that are different but equally important. What is American culture's answer to the quest for self-fulfillment? Compete! Certainly not surrender to God's will regarding the roles He has assigned to men and women!

The blurring of gender distinctions will not only cause confusion in society and church but will misrepresent and distort our concept of God. What is needed now is not a change of words but a change of heart. The Christian church cannot afford to accept secular culture's definition of who men and women are. Nor can its theologians and scholars impose that secular definition on the Bible by changing its language. What a clever way to pull the wool over the eyes of the innocent and unsuspecting!

The Bible does *not* relegate women to second-class status, nor does it in any sense make men superior and women inferior. To draw such distorted conclusions is to misread the Bible. Women and men are equal in worth according to the Word of God, but they have different functions and roles in church and society, roles to which the Word of God calls them to submit in faith and obedience.

Male headship and female submission are not like "a hammer and a nail." The issue "is not power and force, but *structure* and *roles*."[24] The exercise of these two roles are not for suppression but

for the greater good; there is nothing debasing or tyrannical about it. It is "dedication to God's interests" above all.[25] This certainly does not imply male superiority or female inferiority.

Some women thinkers recognize the dangers of feminist propaganda and are able to make informed observations:

> Not surprisingly, since our present day feminists can't understand that women can be equal to men in *essence* but subordinate to them in *function*, the similar question of Jesus' relation to the Father caused perhaps the severest crisis the church has ever faced: the Arian controversy in the fourth century. Despite clear biblical teaching that Jesus and the Father are the same in *essence* (John 1:1; 8:58), but that Jesus is subordinate in *function* (John 4:34; 5:30), Arius and his followers were unable to hold these two things in mind and insisted that if Jesus is subordinate in function, he *must* be subordinate in essence—that is, inferior. The church, of course, decided against Arius, and the universal, received teaching (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) is that Jesus is equal to the Father in essence ("of one being with the Father," as the Nicene Creed says) but subordinate to him in function. If this kind of relationship can exist between Jesus and the Father, certainly it can exist between women and men.[26]

Refusing to follow God's plan is to "malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5). What does it mean to malign the word of God? It means to question, doubt, ignore, oppose, ridicule, or deny the plain teaching of the Bible. The best way to do this is, of course, to ask why any Bible text should be considered authoritative.

Constituents are beginning to wonder when the vast majority of Adventist women who have responded to God's call to the superlative ministry of homemaking and child rearing will receive the support from the church that they deserve. When will we affirm and uphold the ideal of these God-given roles as primary for church and society, so we will no longer hear the sad apologetic, "I'm *just* a homemaker"? The feminist vocal minority has successfully intimidated many of these faithful women, and it is time for them to rise up in righteous

indignation. Furthermore, men need to be defenders of such faithfully courageous women, instead of cheering on those whose philosophy would destroy what God has established.

One of the questions posed by feminists is: "Should Christian ministry, which by all testimony of Scripture is *spiritual* in nature, be limited by the sex of the minister, which is by nature a *human* distinction?"[27] The question puts the burden of proof on the Word of God. On the basis of the Bible it must be observed that while gender is certainly a distinction of humans, though not restricted to humans, humans did not create that distinction. The Bible says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them*" (Gen. 1:27). God did it! And He's glad He did it! He wants to keep it that way! Galatians 3:28, "There is neither . . . male nor female," cannot be used to cancel Genesis 1:27. Neither of them is an ambiguous text. The contexts are not the same. Genesis 1:27 speaks of creation, while Galatians 3:28 speaks of salvation. Men and women were created different from each other, but they are not treated differently as far as salvation is concerned. If the ideal is to transcend sexuality, why did God create male and female in the first place?

A major feminist presupposition, which must be challenged, is that humanness supersedes maleness and femaleness, and that to be male or female is incidental to being human. Thus the biblical idea that God was incarnated as a male would have no theological relevance and is merely a cultural adaptation on the part of the Bible writers. But revelation tells us that "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). This does not mean that God created human beings with an essence that is both male and female. He created them as distinct beings, one distinctively male and the other distinctively female. This act of creation does have theological significance, especially in light of the fact that the ordained ministry derives from the person of Christ.

Finally, radical feminism has a destructive strain. Anything that stands in the way of female self-fulfillment is subject to destruction: marriage, family, fetus, roles, and monogamous relationships. Ardent radical feminists usually support live-in relationships, abortion on demand, and homosexuality as an alternative

lifestyle. On the basis of the rapidly accumulating evidence, Manfred Hauke is close to the truth when he wonders if "it may not be in modern feminism that we find the most radical contempt for women in world history," and which he concludes originates "from a Gnostic-like contempt for women."[28]

Conclusion

We have examined the feminist ideology of today, but it is not a new phenomenon. The roots of the modern feminist movement in America extend at least as far back as the middle of the 19th century. Like today, the movement then called for broad changes in the legal and social structure and in the nature of the marriage relationship. It recognized a need for reform in women's dress, which was impractical and unhealthful (though the feminist solution was itself objectionable, appearing immodest and mannish). The feminist agenda even then included ordination for women in ministry. The movement was called "woman's rights."

Ellen White wanted dress reform, but not the feminist kind and not at the feminist price. In this setting, she noted the complete incompatibility of the feminism of her day with Seventh-day Adventism:

> Those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of woman's rights and the so-called dress reform might as well sever all connection with the third angel's message. The spirit which attends the one cannot be in harmony with the other. The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women.[29]

Note her two objections: 1) The *spirit* of the woman's rights movement could not be in harmony with Seventh-day Adventism. Like oil and water, the two cannot be mixed. 2) The *Scriptures are plain* on the relations and rights of men and women. She appealed to the *plain meaning* of Scripture, which feminists try to discount or to reinterpret. Ellen White declared such efforts incompatible with the message and work God gave to the Seventh-day Adventist

movement. Even though she wrote this 130 years ago, it could have been written today. The times are different but the issue is the same. Such counsel must not be ignored or discounted.

In all fairness, it must be said in conclusion that not all who support women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church subscribe to all of the feminist ideas outlined in this chapter. Many sincerely think it is a matter of human justice; they simply have not recognized the feminist theology behind it. They do not understand the long-range theological implications, or else they disassociate themselves from those implications.

Many Adventists have been caught off guard by the feminist assault on fundamental beliefs, by its reinterpretation of the Bible and its reconstruction of history. Some are surprised and shocked at how feminist presuppositions and values are accepted almost without question. Perhaps in the last three decades we have been conditioned to respond in a certain way when cries for justice and equality are raised. Let us hope the church is becoming sensitized to the inevitable consequence of allowing the values of contemporary pagan society, which are supportive of feminist goals, to set the agenda for the church.

NOTES

1. R. Letham divides feminism in the religious sphere into three segments: evangelical feminism, consisting of those who hold to the authority of Scripture and to Christ as Savior; Christian feminism, which includes those who, while not evangelical, are committed to a Christian faith; and religious feminism, consisting of those who do not subscribe to Christianity but whose philosophy includes a religious world-view. See R. Letham, "The Hermeneutics of Feminism," *Themelios* 17/3 (April/May, 1992), pp. 4-7.

2. The terminology used to describe the various groups is not uniform, so authors usually define their own terms. See, for instance, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women In The Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), pp. 21-25, and Gerhard F. Hasel, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation," *Adventists Affirm* 3/2 (Fall 1989), pp. 12-23.

3. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 3.

4. Mary Pride, *The Way Home* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1985), p. xii.

5. Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 7. See also Donna Steichen, *Ungodly Rage* (San Francisco:

Ignatius Press, 1991), an exposé of feminism's impact on Roman Catholicism. Steichen says: "Religious feminism is the logical extension of secular feminism into the realm of the sacred" (p. 77).

6. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 19.

7. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Interpretation*, Oct. 1990, pp. 353-368.

8. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1983), p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 41. Emphasis mine.

10. Ibid., p. 63.

11. Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), p. 446.

12. Ibid., pp. 447-448.

13. Fiorenza, *In Memory*, p. 68. Emphasis mine.

14. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," in Judith L. Weidman, ed., *Christian Feminism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 9-12.

15. Carole R. Fontaine, "The **NRSV** and the **REB**: A Feminist Critique," *Theology Today*, Oct. 1990, p. 274.

16. Ibid., p. 277.

17. The word for Rock here is *tsur* and is masculine. The accompanying verb form is *yalad*, which is also masculine. Though feminine forms of this verb are often used in the Hebrew Bible to denote the feminine role in procreation, that is certainly not the case in this instance. For other examples of the masculine usage of the verb, see Gen. 4:18; 10:8, 13, 15, 24, 26; 22:23; 25:3; 1 Chron. 1:10, 11, 13, 18, 20; Prov. 23:22; Dan. 11:6.

18. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., "The **NRSV** and the **REB**: A New Testament Critique," *Theology Today*, Oct. 1990, p. 283.

19. Sakae Kubo, "The New Revised Standard Version", *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29/1 (Spring 1991), p. 69.

20. Michael Bauman, "Verbal Plunder: Combatting the Feminist Encroachment on the Language of Religion and Morality," *Evangelical Journal* 8/2 (Fall 1990), p. 64. Emphasis mine.

21. *Readings For Year A* and *Readings For Year B* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983, 1984).

22. Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 228-235. Hauke also shows how the idea of God as Father-Mother is actually rooted in Gnostic rather than biblical thought (pp. 158, 171-172).

23. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*, pp. 4-5. Emphasis mine.

24. Pride, *Way Home*, p. 196.

25. Ibid., p. 199.

26. Ibid., pp. 225-226, footnote #6.

27. Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters*, p. 436.

28. Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, pp. 470-471.

29. *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) 1:421. The statement was first published in 1864.

Chapter Seven

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: A CRITIQUE

Many of the arguments used in support of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church are either based on feminist presuppositions and/or use a method of Bible interpretation that would be as destructive of Adventism as it has been of other denominations. In this chapter we will examine a number of these arguments and their presuppositions.

Some material is quoted without identifying the source or the author. The reason for adopting this procedure, though the scholarly way is to footnote every such reference, is to focus on the arguments rather than the identity of individuals, some of whom are my colleagues in ministry and/or personal friends. All unidentified quotes in this chapter are from Adventist sources, are representative and summarize pro-ordinationist arguments. None of the persons quoted have rejected the authority of the Bible. In fact, they consider themselves to be adherents and defenders of biblical authority.

Their arguments are clustered under a number of headings: qualifications for ministry, cultural conditioning of the Bible, biblical authority, biblical direction, equality, feminist reconstruction, the leading of the Holy Spirit, theological pluralism, a sociological approach, and other arguments put forth by some who do not use the historical-critical method, cultural conditioning, or feminist views as presented in the previous chapter.

Qualifications

God has blessed the ministry of women; therefore they should be ordained, one argument declares. But if the ministry of dedicated

women produces spiritual fruit, does that constitute proof of the biblical rightness of ordination to spiritual headship? God's "mercy in practice does not settle matters of principle any more than majority votes do. The conclusion that God's use of women presbyters [a senior individual, an elder, who reveals wisdom and exercises authority] shows that he wants them does not follow."[1] And God has blessed the ministry of many men whom the church has not ordained.

Women are as qualified for ministry as men; therefore they should be ordained, another argument states: "God has equipped" women "with the spiritual gifts necessary to carry out the difficult task of pastoral ministry." If possession of spiritual gifts, such as leadership ability and preaching skills, were enough to qualify for ordination, we would have to ordain every male who gives evidence of such gifts. But we do not do so when other important qualifications, such as moral reputation or the ability to manage personal finances, are absent. Arguments such as the above, by themselves, cannot be sustained.

In order to be biblically accurate regarding qualifications for ordained leadership, we must add to spiritual gifts and fruitfulness the other specifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1ff., such as the pastor being the "husband of one wife." A genuine call to ministry must meet all specifications.

Cultural Conditioning

The previous chapter revealed a primary feminist presupposition—that the Bible was culturally conditioned, especially those passages which speak of male and female role distinctions or which appear to reserve the pastoral office for men. Proponents of women's ordination have generally accepted the feminist cultural conditioning argument.

One writer, while recognizing that "the Bible contains a message of enormous significance for modern men and women," also states "that a good deal of the biblical material reflects the cultures that surrounded its composition and has no religious authority for Christians today." Another writer is of the opinion that it is an error "to

regard certain aspects of ancient culture as theologically normative [simply] because the biblical documents reflect or refer to them."

The fact that there is some truth to these statements makes them all the more dangerous. Of course the Bible refers to elements of its own culture. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?" (Matt. 10:29). They were indeed, though nothing here requires *us* to buy or sell sparrows at this or any other price. Jesus' statement simply reflects the practice of the time, employing it to make a point about man's exceeding value to God. But shall we use the Bible's cultural content to deny its authority? The writers cited above seem to open the way to do so. We cannot but wonder how observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, which was an integral part of Jewish culture, can be defended if one accepts such thinking. After all, theological arguments appealing to contemporary culture have been made in support of Sunday observance.

First Corinthians 14:34-35 teaches that everything in worship should be done in an orderly manner, a point made explicit in verse 40. Proponents of women's ordination accept the timeless prescription of that principle. But they consider that its details, such as "women should remain silent in the churches," should not be considered timeless but be understood as only first-century application of the principle. But if statements of principle have permanent authority, what about other principles that apply, such as the principle of male headship-female submission? However, on the basis of supposed cultural conditioning, feminists deny that headship-submission is a timeless principle. They do not accept it as a "gospel principle" because it is restrictive. If we adopt this reasoning, the detail of seventh-day Sabbath observance could be written off as only an ancient Jewish application of the timeless principle of rest. Furthermore, if the timeless principle of order in worship were applied generally, as feminists insist, it would require that men be silent in church as well as women.

Proponents reject the argument of culture when it works against women's ordination. For example, they do not accept as a valid argument the six thousand years of the Judeo-Christian tradition supporting male priesthood and ministry. They reject the past, seeing the present as more enlightened and therefore author-

itative. They see opponents of women's ordination as unwilling to discard tradition. Yet they fail to see that what may be today's relevance becomes tomorrow's tradition.

Proponents also conclude that the fact that biblical prototypes for Christian ministers were male represents merely a concession to the dominant patriarchal culture and is therefore not a valid principle applicable for all time. They attempt to prove that in the Hellenistic or Jewish culture of Paul's day women were considered inferior to men. The conclusion follows that Paul taught female submission because (supposedly) his culture conditioned him to do so. They assume that culture had a greater determining influence on the Bible writers than did divine inspiration and revelation.

But in fact, Paul's view of male headship and female submission is based on the order of creation and male-female role distinctions, not on Hellenistic or Jewish culture. His instructions in 1 Timothy 2:11-13, forbidding the leadership role of authoritative teaching to women, were based explicitly on the creation order of Genesis ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve"), not on his own social situation. Because the Bible thus identifies these instructions as rooted in our very creation, we must take them seriously as universal and timeless, applying equally to our time and situation, and not dismiss them as culturally conditioned because they do not meet the approval of one vocal portion of our society today.

However, when Paul says "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16), he gives no indication of universal obligation. The principle of Christian greeting and cordiality is timeless, though the mode of its expression need not be. In contemporary culture it may best be observed by a handshake. The instruction to Moses to remove his shoes in the presence of God may best be observed today by a man's removing his hat as a sign of respect. These are examples of what we might call cultural translation.

Cultural conditioning, however, as applied to the question of ordination for women, implies more than an effort to find equivalent expressions in our culture. As we saw in the previous chapter, it means claiming that the Bible's commands are in fact *contrary* to God's will—expressions of patriarchy, not of God's intent. Liberal Christian feminists hold that Paul was merely giving his own

opinion, which need not have authority today. Biblical feminists argue that God permitted, or perhaps even required, the restrictions Paul set forth because it was the best He could manage at that time with a race steeped in patriarchy. The end result of both lines of reasoning is the same: the Bible in this instance gives the wrong counsel for us today, even misinterpreting the creation story to bolster that counsel; God's will is that we disobey it.

To bolster their case, proponents claim that Jesus broke the cultural barriers of His day in how He respected and treated women, setting an example for us to follow in removing all role distinctions today. But they cannot have things both ways—if, as a matter of principle, Jesus stormed the barricades of culture to revolutionize the treatment of women, why would God accommodate a race supposedly steeped in patriarchy by restricting the roles of women in the church? If inspiration was functioning in Paul's counsel on this matter (as he claims explicitly in 1 Corinthians 14:37), why wasn't his counsel consistent with what proponents claim Jesus was trying to do?

Arguments based on the supposed culture of ancient times are often precarious and sometimes clearly in error. For instance, Paul's counsel about women's silence in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35) is often explained by the need to distinguish Christian worship at Corinth from practices in the pagan temple of Aphrodite there, with its thousand prostitutes whose rejection of modesty and decorum proclaimed their immorality. The first-century geographer Strabo did write of such a temple at Corinth, but what is not widely known is that he did so in the *historical* section of his account, not in describing the Corinth of his own day. The temple to which he referred had been destroyed two centuries earlier; Aphrodite's temple in Paul's time was so insignificant it merited hardly a mention from Strabo.[3] In this case, the cultural conditioning argument is based on wrong information.

We could cite other examples where assertions about the culture of ancient times is open to question. It is widely claimed that women had few rights and opportunities, that their lives were largely confined to home and family, that they could not travel or have contact with men outside their families, and that they had little or nothing to call

their own. Yet we find the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 buying property and conducting commerce; Lydia was an independent businesswoman (Acts 16:14); and women (some prominent and some not) traveled with Jesus and His disciples and supported them "out of *their own* means" (Luke 8:1-3, emphasis supplied). The Bible gives no hint that these women were breaking the social mold, or that Jesus was doing so in His treatment of women. Contrast that with the criticism the Bible tells us Jesus took for the socially-unacceptable practice of receiving sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:2). One can find anti-woman statements among the writings of the rabbis, but did everyone hold such views? The Bible offers no evidence that these statements represent the whole culture. For that matter, we cannot be positive how widely those views were held among the rabbis! The argument from supposed cultural conditioning is often flimsy at its foundation.

If in spite of such weakness cultural conditioning is accepted as a principle of Bible interpretation, culture becomes the norm applied to Scripture, and the church adapts to culture. Far better for the church in all ages to apply the norm of Scripture to culture, requiring a response of submission and obedience.

On what basis, then, does the contemporary church decide what to do about an issue such as the ordination of women? Does it decide on the basis of what the Bible says, or on the basis of the views of contemporary culture? Do contemporary cultural values present us with dependable criteria by which to validate biblical principles? If we accept the feminist presupposition of cultural conditioning, contemporary culture would determine how we interpret the Bible!

Certainly Christians are not to be isolated from the struggles of culture and society. For one spokesman, that means "we need to observe the changed social context of the 1980s, influenced as it has been by 'affirmative action' and anti-discrimination legislation." In other words, satisfy all human demands, though they may run counter to the Bible. But Christians are to speak to the struggles of society and culture in biblical terms and, if necessary, confront them, not capitulate.

Perhaps it would be helpful to remind ourselves again that the 1974 Bible Conferences rejected culture as a norm for Bible interpretation.

Biblical Authority

It is important also to see how the feminist reinterpretation of the Bible and reconstruction of history has influenced proponents of women's ordination in their views of biblical authority.

One author states that the Bible "is the human expression of the Word of God—the Word of God in the words of men. In the various biblical documents, the Word of God is incorporated, indeed incarnated, in the words and thoughts of the different men who wrote them." Is this a way of saying that the Bible is not the Word of God but simply *contains* the Word of God?

Another writer finds the charismatic approach appealing, saying, "These movements that emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit usually grant a greater role to women, believing that the Spirit may choose whom He will for ministry apart from the usual patterns of church recognition, theological training, or other certification." We must ask: Would it be wise for the Seventh-day Adventist church to do the same, moving away from the authority of the Bible to the authority of a subjective charismatic experience? Could "other certification" possibly refer to biblical specifications for ministry, such as "the husband of one wife"?

Direction of the Bible

Anything restrictive, that has parameters or is limiting, is not "gospel," is not part of the direction of the Bible, says one argument. Concerning that "direction" or "trajectory" one writer observes: "This direction of movement toward equality and fellowship is the most important normative principle that emerges from the New Testament." And "The principle of equality and mutuality is supreme." If that were all the Bible had to say about male-female relationships, if there were no other Bible principles to be considered, it would be easy to draw the conclusion that ordination for women is not forbidden. But that is a most radical interpretation, because it denies altogether the biblical principles of submission and headship in home and church. It is a nullifying approach rather than an affirmative one, contradicting Adventism's

historic interpretive principle of harmony and unity in the Bible.

Ephesians 5:22-23 compares the husband-wife relationship to that of Christ and the church: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour." Commenting on this passage, one proponent says the idea "that the male was the head of the wife was an affirmation of cultural reality," and is to be seen "not as privilege but as service." If this argument is valid, it implies that Christ is not the head of the church in an authoritative sense but in the sense of being the church's servant. Thus the husband becomes the servant of the wife, and Christ becomes the servant of the church. The intent of the passage is reversed. This reversal is expressed by one writer like this: "The fact that two-thirds of church members are women indicates their higher spiritual nature. Woman's subordination to man results from sin, not creation, and is not the ideal any more than thorns and thistles." But we have already seen that the New Testament attributes male headship and female submission to creation.

One writer asserts, "Man and woman received joint dominion at creation. She became subject to man only as punishment for her sin. But Christ redeemed her from the curse of the law, restoring the original equality." If such an argument is valid, then it could be concluded that male headship is also punishment for Adam's sin. But we need to remember that it is the New Testament, not the Old, which says, based on the gospel message, that a presiding pastor must be "the husband of one wife." Another Adventist feminist goes further, saying that woman's having been created last "proves her superiority rather than inferiority, since creation moved toward a climax." Logic forces the use of feminist language in asking the question: What really is the Bible's "direction," male/female equality or feminine superiority?

Further, if male headship and female submission are the consequence of the fall into sin and are therefore "sinful," and if the Christ-event and Calvary have remedied these consequences of sin, logically the same can be said (and *is* being said) about homosexuality. If the "sins" of headship and submission have been

abrogated by Calvary, then so has the sin of homosexuality. But such a conclusion makes nonsense of the Bible!

Another prominent spokesman for women's ordination insists, in spite of the testimony of the 1974 Bible Conferences, that Adventists have never interpreted the Bible literally. This is why, he says, texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and 1 Timothy 3:2 cannot be used in opposition to women's ordination. What this spokesman proposes is that we must understand these texts as "specific instructions to specific circumstances." In other words, their authority is limited only to Paul's time and circumstance and cannot be considered valid for ours. Furthermore, he insists that these texts say absolutely nothing about the ordination of women one way or another. He is correct, of course, that they do not explicitly say, "you shall ordain women" or "you shall not ordain women." But if, as he says, we need a principled approach, texts such as those we will discuss in the next chapter certainly help us find valid principles that support opposition.

The same spokesman asks, "Did God's initiative in this new direction of involving women in ministry reach its climax in New Testament times? Or did God intend the church to continue on today in the same direction?" His implied answer is "no" to the first question and "yes" to the second. It needs to be pointed out that Galatians 3:28 ("there is neither . . . male nor female"), to which the same writer refers in order to sustain gender equality as a relevant principle, says nothing at all about ordination of women either. Nevertheless, assuming that Galatians 3:28 represents the mature thinking of Paul, proponents conclude that "the latest biblical word on a practice determines what is normative for Christians today," and that spiritual oneness of male and female point in the direction of ordination for women.

According to this interpretation, ignoring this "direction" blasphemes the Word of God and discredits the gospel. But it is far more accurate to conclude that what constitutes blasphemy of the Word of God is when *all* of the biblical principles that apply are not taken into account. Traditionally, Adventist Bible interpretation has held that the Bible does not contradict itself, and that clear passages assist in understanding obscure passages.

Furthermore, the so-called "direction" or "development" in the Bible from the subjugation of women in Old Testament times to their liberation in New Testament times cannot be sustained as a valid argument. The fact is that there is no such "direction." It is a false argument. There were prophetesses in both Old Testament and New Testament times. Women such as Deborah were in leadership positions in Old Testament times. It is the New Testament which clearly states that a husband is head of his wife (1 Cor. 11:3), and that women should not exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). Obviously the internal evidence of the Bible does not point in the direction of women's ordination. Furthermore, Galatians was written around A.D. 58, and 1 Timothy was written around A.D. 64. Which letter would best represent the more "mature" Pauline thought?

Equality

For many who support women's ordination, Jesus as the liberator has become the theme, the Bible's defining structure or paradigm. Where you stand determines what you see! If liberation is the defining structure, then every Bible text is viewed from that vantage point and inevitable conclusions are drawn.

One proponent of women's ordination suggests that the biblical principle of equality (Gal. 3:28) and the principle of sensitivity to culture (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:31-33) must operate in dynamic tension. He says: "If we are faithful to the New Testament, our position on the subject of the ordination of women must not be settled by a literalistic hermeneutic that appeals only to specific practices. Today our position must also be hammered out within the tension of these principles."

The same writer accepts Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as an authority on New Testament interpretation in spite of the fact that she does not accept the Bible as inspired revelation but as a historical record of the responses of religious communities. But if we adopt this approach to the New Testament, what conclusions would we have to draw on other issues, such as homosexuality? Let us repeat his statement, substituting "homosexuality" for "ordination of women"

and see how it sounds: "If we are faithful to the New Testament, our position on the subject of *homosexuality* must not be settled by a literalistic hermeneutic that appeals only to specific practices. Today our position must also be hammered out within the tension of these principles." On the basis of the principle of equality ("God made us this way") and the principle of sensitivity to culture (contemporary culture accepts homosexuality as a legitimate alternate life-style), the practice of homosexuality could not be condemned no matter what the Bible says about it. But our concern must be where such a method of Bible interpretation will ultimately lead the church. We would have to conclude that if in a given culture, such as in Muslim countries, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath offends, it should not be initiated or expected in spite of what the Bible says. But in reality, diversity of practice is permissible only where it can be demonstrated that the Bible has nothing to say regarding the practice.

The pro-ordination argument introduces tension between biblical literalism and sensitivity to culture in such a way that there is no right or wrong—only tension. But is it true that we must learn to live with such tension? Is there no other answer? Such an argument makes an opponent of the possibility of finding harmony in the Bible!

Feminist Reconstruction

A female writer reasons that

> it would be highly unlikely that a woman would be chosen as spiritual leader over an entire country, such as Deborah, Miriam, or Huldah, if no women were permitted to occupy a lesser position! To declare women could be top leaders of a country but yet could not be a lowly priest would be preposterous! Women would certainly not be thrust into prominent positions of responsibility without some preliminary training in minor roles, such as elders and priests.

But the priesthood in the Old Testament certainly did not represent a "lowly" or "minor" role. In saying so the author reveals

what she really believes about ministry and ministers. Her reasoning is secular because, biblically speaking, the role of priest was considered to be higher than that of political leadership.

In keeping with the feminist reconstruction of history and reinterpretation of Scripture, the same author has constructed a fanciful interpretation as to why Jesus chose only male apostles. She says:

> Actually Jesus had no choice other than to choose males. Women, oppressed for generations, were taught to serve or act as servants. That was their way of life. Therefore, Jesus did not need to give them the type of training He was about to give the twelve males—teaching them how to humble themselves and serve. During their training all the males revealed marked character defects, defects common to many males. These same traits were never pointed out and corrected in any of his female contacts. . . . For Christ to take these crude, covetous, rough, unschooled, unprincipled males and train them to become gentle, courteous, kind, helpful, honest, humble, thoughtful, and compassionate Christians was indeed an out and out miracle and a marvelous manifestation of what the Holy Spirit can do if given the opportunity to work. That women did not need training in service is very apparent or Jesus would have seen that they received it. . . . The adage that he is so heavenly-minded, he is no earthly-good could be applied to most so-called Christian males and is a serious denunciation of true Christianity.

The implication is that women did not need to be trained by Jesus because they were naturally gentle, courteous, kind, helpful, honest, humble, thoughtful, compassionate, principled, and obviously superior. If there were one iota of truth to such an idea, the question would immediately arise as to why Jesus did not choose such perfect creatures to begin with and save Himself a lot of work and trouble. The biblical truth is that "all [male and female] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

The fact remains that Jesus did choose twelve men, and no women, as His apostles. He did not choose men because they

needed training that the women did not need, but because it was in harmony with the order of creation. To suggest that women were not selected as apostles because they did not need any training is pure fabrication and wishful thinking. There is no biblical evidence for such an imaginary interpretation, based only on feminist reconstruction.

The same author insists that a major reason for the change in mode of baptism from immersion to sprinkling was to keep women out of the ministry. Men, she says, did not want to see their wives in the arms of another man in the ritual of baptism. Another fantasy!

She appeals to justice, equality, and the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers, saying:

> I believe that very strong biblical principles of justice and equality and of the inclusion of women in ministry that we find in the New Testament, point to the ordination of women. . . . The priesthood of all believers means that arguments about the Old Testament priesthood cannot be used by us as Christians anymore. We are all priests before God. This is compelling evidence but it does not apply to everyone in every situation in all cultures, therefore, we need a sense of tolerance and respect for those who disagree.

This statement is based on the false premise that the priesthood of all believers is a New Testament innovation. The New Testament support for the priesthood of all believers is found in 1 Peter 2:9, but this text in fact quotes from Exodus 19:5-6, "You will be my treasured possession. . . . You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." What is more, the priesthood of all believers depended upon obedience to all of God's instructions: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, . . ." (Ex. 19:5). One cannot set aside the instructions of God and legitimately claim to be part of the priesthood of all believers.

The statement quoted above raises some highly significant questions: (1) Do the principles of justice and equality, which certainly *are* found in the Bible, cancel the principles of headship and submission

also found in the Bible, implying that the Bible contradicts itself? (2) Do not the male priesthood of the Old Testament and the male apostles of the New Testament also "point" in a direction, based on the hermeneutical principle of unity and harmony in the Bible? (3) Does the priesthood of all believers mean that members of the Body of Christ can freely practice what is not in harmony with Bible teaching? The New Testament says the pastor should be "the husband of one wife." (4) If equality and justice are biblical principles, yet do not apply to everyone in every situation and culture, is this not relativizing the Bible? Do not all biblical principles apply to all people in all cultures at all times, whether they are recognized or not? (5) On what basis can one uphold the principles of justice and equality, while at the same time rejecting or ignoring the principles of headship, submission, and male-female role distinctions?

Another proponent of women's ordination makes a contradictory statement when he criticizes an opponent's use of typologies, saying "Typologies are illustrations, a teaching aid. Let's take all [biblical] teaching aids into account, not just one." The problem here is that he wants to take into account only justice and equality, not headship and submission. This exposes a major divergence between proponents and opponents of women's ordination. In their interpretation of biblical teaching on this matter opponents of ordination take into account *all* these principles in seeking the answer: justice, equality, role distinctions, headship, and submission. Proponents, on the other hand, are selective, refusing to consider headship and submission in their search for the answer. Shall we not take all of Scripture into account rather than pick and choose what fits the occasion or the demand? Furthermore, we should be consistent. If we are to take all biblical teaching aids into account, should we not also take all biblical principles into account?

Another strong proponent likes to speak of "official discrimination" in reference to the church's decision at Indianapolis not to ordain women. But it was not discrimination at all. It was, rather, official submission to the Word of God and therefore highly commendable. For the vast majority of Seventh-day Adventists, the decision is considered to be a demonstration of faithfulness to the Word of God in the face of extreme pressure to conform to this

world. We have arrived at a most distressing time in the history of Christianity if being true to the Bible on this, or on any other issue to which it speaks, is seen as discrimination.

Certainly the Bible refers to many women who held high and responsible offices both in the religious community and in society at large. But the fact is that there is no Bible evidence that any woman ever was appointed or served as priest in the Old Testament or as bishop/elder/pastor in the New Testament.

The Leading of the Holy Spirit

Some proponents appeal to the Holy Spirit as a higher authority than Scripture itself. But the witness of the Spirit is to the Bible and of the Bible, never above the Bible. Ellen White says: "Since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word."[3]

Although the call to ministry must come to a person from the Spirit, a call to ordination comes in harmony with the Bible and is recognized by the church. The Holy Spirit operates in individual lives and in the life of the church that is faithful to the Word of God, and these two operations of the Spirit must agree.

The argument is used that we must heed what the Spirit is doing in our midst, calling women to the ordained ministry. This argument could be used by evangelicals to sustain Sunday observance—that for centuries the Spirit has been moving the Christian church away from the seventh-day Sabbath and that Adventists have failed to recognize what the Spirit has been doing.

As long as we are in submission to the Spirit who leads into all the truth of the Bible, the Spirit can work. The question of the church's authority to ordain those who "feel" called by the Spirit to the office of elder or pastor must be resolved on the basis of the Bible and not on that of personal claims. The "following of impressions, to the neglect of the Scriptures, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin."[4] The Holy Spirit who calls to ministry is the same Spirit who inspired biblical instruction concerning qualifications and specifications for the office of elder or pastor. The Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself by calling someone to an office

from which he or she is excluded by the same Spirit's instruction. The spiritual gifts and invitations to service in the church that men and women receive from the Spirit do not supersede the prior role distinctions established by God at creation. Those role distinctions are foundational to everything the New Testament has to say about men and women in ministry. The order of creation as seen in the Bible establishes for all time the differing yet complementary roles of men and women in both home and church. This order was established by our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head of the church, and the Head has something to say about how the body functions.

The fact that charismatic (authority of the so-called "Spirit") views are appealing to some of us suggests that Adventist spirituality is undergoing a radical change from confrontation *by* the Bible to confrontation *of* the Bible. Instead of submitting to the Bible we find ourselves disputing with it instead, pitting one Bible writer against another and sometimes one writer against himself, disputing about whether or not Paul says what he means or means what he says. Instead of demanding a "thus saith the Lord," some are asking, "What saith society and culture?" or "What saith your feelings?"

If role distinctions between men and women are God's order and command, "as even the Law says" (1 Cor. 14:34), then ordination of women to the office of spiritual headship is excluded, because it would be out of harmony with the Bible's teaching. It's just that simple. It is inconceivable that any member of the Seventh-day Adventist church could think that to uphold the clear teaching of Scripture on this or any other issue of doctrine, morality, ethics, or lifestyle, is either unjust, oppressive, or immoral. The Seventh-day Adventist church has prided itself on being the church of the Bible; we cannot have it both ways and maintain credibility.

Theological Pluralism

Theological pluralism means the acceptance of a plurality of views, a diversity of Bible interpretation, not only in North America but around the world. It means that *divergent* views on an issue involving Bible interpretation can exist side by side in the

church without threatening its unity of doctrine and mission. But experience has revealed that theological pluralism produces intolerance of conservative and orthodox theologians who continue to insist that there is absolute and final truth.

Theological pluralism is not as easy to understand as the arguments we have already examined above, but such pluralism is essential if the interpretation of the Bible allowing for the ordination of women is to be accepted by the church. In order for that to happen the church must be convinced of the soundness of the idea of theological pluralism. The church must be persuaded that pluralism is not a threat, even though it stands in direct contradiction to the whole idea of unity.

We need to recognize where danger lies. First of all, in order for theological pluralism to be legitimatized, the church must have reached the point where it is *willing to exchange doctrine for theology.* In other words, no doctrines would be viewed as definitive truth; there would only be the theological search for truth. The search is the thing; thus divergent theological views are possible and need not be resolved. This would make the authority of contemporary theologians greater than that of the Bible itself. But this is not the way to spiritual revival. It is the way to theological and doctrinal fragmentation.

Second, theological pluralism is evidence of the *breakdown of theological consensus.* Has Adventism reached that point in its history, especially when it stands on the threshold of its greatest opportunity for evangelism and growth? Have we reached the place where we now believe that fundamental doctrine can no longer be specifically defined? Are we becoming more and more selective when it comes to the teachings of the Bible? While the ordination of women is a secondary issue, and certainly not a test of fellowship, both proponents and opponents see the issue in relation to the understanding and interpretation of the Bible, an issue of fundamental importance. For this reason the Seventh-day Adventist church does stand at a theological crossroads. The critical question facing the Seventh-day Adventist church is whether it is prepared, at this stage of its history, to adopt a method of Bible interpretation conditioned by contemporary culture.

Third, theological pluralism by its very nature has to be *satisfied with tentative truth.* Pluralism cannot hold to any truth claim at all, and even those who hold to pluralism must call their own claim for truth into question. When we no longer see the Bible as the final authority for truth, we must find substitute authorities, such as the authority of the church, or of religious experience, or of theological pluralism.

The very nature of Adventism, with its claim for "the truth," precludes the adoption of theological pluralism. They are incompatible, for to adopt theological pluralism would mean that doctrinal affirmations would only be tentative. Few people are willing to commit themselves and their means to something that is tentative. A message-oriented church must inquire how it would be possible to sustain any kind of fruitful evangelism in such a theological atmosphere. Cultural and ethnic pluralism is one thing, but theological pluralism is quite another. We cannot justify the latter on the basis of the former. To affirm the one does not require affirming the other.

Adventism may be particularly vulnerable to theological pluralism because it has never adopted a formal confession or creed. There are dangers inherent in creeds, but it must be recognized that there are also dangers in the non-creedal approach. The non-creedal approach makes it easier to introduce interpretations of the faith never intended by founders who believed it wise to take the non-creedal route. But this also means that Adventism must remain especially watchful, eternally vigilant. If conservatives can be convinced that pluralism is not a threat to orthodox Adventist faith, more than half the battle for liberalization will have been won.

Fourth, theological pluralism *suggests theological evolution,* implying that the religious experience of today's believer is somehow a much more mature and progressive faith than that of the Bible writers, and that the thinking of contemporary theologians is more reliable than that of the Bible writers. Theological pluralism inevitably leads to religious pluralism. That is to say, when the principle of pluralism is applied to the spectrum of the religious world it leads to the conclusion that Christianity is not unique among world religions. It also leads to the conclusion that the

Seventh-day Adventist church is not unique among Protestant churches. Thus pluralism threatens the very identity of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Fifth, by diluting Adventism's doctrinal clarity, pluralism *muddles Adventist mission.* The only way we can tell whether we still have an Adventist message is if it can be identified in specific terms. Pluralism does not allow for that. Theological pluralism sets itself up as the judge of all doctrinal claims. It excludes as unacceptable those thinkers who would dare to claim more than a tentative status for doctrine. Also, while demanding wide tolerance for its own views, it is most intolerant of traditional orthodox views. It does not hesitate to engage in name-calling, using terms such as "fundamentalist," "reactionary," "divisive," "ignorant," "unsophisticated," "traditionalist," and "obscurantist" to brand those who hold to unchangeable and absolute propositional truth.

Sixth, pluralism *allows for contradictory theological statements to be credited with equal validity.* Thus both of the following could be recognized as truth: "The Bible teaches that the seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday, is the day on which Christians should worship," and "The Bible teaches that the Lord's Day, Sunday, is the day on which Christians should worship." Yet these statements cannot both be true because they are neither consistent nor complementary. They are contradictory. One of them is false.

Seventh, pluralism is behind the idea that *"truth is confessional."* Such a statement sounds good on the surface, but it is very misleading. If it is understood in the sense that truth must be confessed, there is no problem. But if it is understood in the sense that truth is whatever a group of people confess it to be, there are major problems. It would mean, for example, that the seventh-day Sabbath is truth only for those who confess it to be so. This makes the religious experience of the group more authoritative than the Bible.

Sociological Approach

A recently published book approaches the women's ordination issue primarily from a sociological perspective because it is the

author's opinion that "a people's understanding of God is shaped by those social factors that give formation to them as a people." The social milieu certainly gives rise to questions about God, but God's people seek the answers to those questions in the Bible.

Given his sociological premise, the author does not hesitate to say that "our understanding of Christ and Scripture is already conditioned by our culture and by the social position we occupy in society." That is the very problem that underlies the whole matter of biblical authority and interpretation. Too many people have allowed contemporary culture to condition their interpretation of the Bible on the subject of the role of women in ministry.

Another Argument

The introduction to this book made it clear that not all proponents of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church use the historical-critical method or its conclusions, or represent the feminist views presented elsewhere in this book. These proponents are in harmony with opponents by not limiting biblical authority, but holding to the full authority of the Bible. Generally speaking their position rests on two basic premises. They hold that: (1) in the Old Testament, male headship and female submission have to do with the post-fall relationship of Adam and Eve and cannot be traced back to creation itself; and (2) in the New Testament, male headship and female submission are only applied to the marriage relationship and not to the church at large.

The question that must be asked concerning these two premises is: Can they be supported by biblical evidence?

Headship: Pre-Fall or Post-Fall

It is significant that the focus in the Bible's creation story is on the creation of the man first. Genesis 2 and 3 focus on Adam all the way through. Adam was created first from the dust of the ground, symbolizing his relationship to and dependence upon nature. Eve was created next from Adam's rib, symbolizing her relationship to and dependence upon him. It was the man who would learn how to

utilize the gifts of nature for their sustenance. And it was the woman who would learn how to help the man succeed.

It was Adam whom God addressed concerning the forbidden fruit, and in so doing God indicated Adam's primary leadership duty (Gen. 2:16-17). Another example of the man's leading role is Adam's response of delight when he saw Eve the first time: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (2:23). That response certainly denotes Adam's recognition of completeness. It is of interest, however, that Adam spoke, not Eve—she was created for him, to make him complete. God then makes a universal application and says that it is "a man" (2:24) who leaves father and mother, and is united to his wife. We can happily agree that "The introductory 'therefore' [in Gen 2:24) indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the pattern for all future human sexual relationships." The woman was created for the man—"for him" (2:18)—and their pre-fall relationship included male headship and female submission in a loving unity and harmony.

Following the fall God did not address Eve, but Adam: "But the Lord God called to the man" (Gen. 3:9), and held him directly responsible for the tragic events. Adam became aware of his nakedness (3:10), and God asked him how: "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (3:11). Only after Adam responded by blaming his wife did God address Eve, asking "What is this you have done?" (3:13).

Thus in the Garden of Eden and before the "curse," God recognized Adam's pre-fall leadership and responsibility. Had there been no such roles before the fall, we would expect God, who knew the whole situation already, to address Eve first as the leader in sin. The only explanation for God doing otherwise is that He had given leadership of the first family to Adam.

One of the major consequences of the fall for Eve was, "Your desire shall be for your husband and he will rule over you" (3:16). Ellen White commented:

> Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God

> had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God's plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.[5]

It should be emphasized that prior to the fall, though he and Eve were equals, Adam was the loving head of the family. This divine arrangement or Law resulted in complete harmony, until Eve attempted to "rise above her original position." After the fall, the necessity of the woman's submission to the man as head was further underscored. This was the only way the harmonious union, that was threatened by sin, could be maintained. Ellen G. White explained:

> In the creation God had made her [Eve] the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband.[6]

> When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. . . . But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse.[7]

Ellen White was faithful to Scripture, attributing total equality to Adam and Eve before the entry of sin. Though the fall affected their relationship, Mrs. White clearly acknowledged that it did not change their equal status. Speaking of women of her own day, and through all time, she observed, "Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal."[8]

Yet she recognized that subjection, or submission, is still a part of God's plan, for "We women must remember that God has placed us subject to the husband. He is the head . . . . We must yield to the head."[9] Also, "The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God."[10] When a woman endorses and supports her husband's leadership role, she is truly her husband's helper in the biblical sense.

Adam and Eve were obedient to God's plan and in harmony with one another in their relationship. Nowhere did Mrs. White say that sin ended their equality, but that "sin brought discord." When sin entered the picture, their "union"—that is to say the marriage relationship itself—could only be maintained by the submission of one to the other. God chose Eve to be submissive to Adam, not the other way round. Why? The context of the above statement from *Patriarchs and Prophets* helps us find the answer, and in that answer Mrs. White supports Scripture.

In reference to creation, namely the creation of Eve, she wrote, "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him."[11] The method of Eve's creation was to symbolize her relationship to Adam. She was not created from his head symbolizing her control as his head, nor from his feet symbolizing a subservient relationship. She was to stand by his side as his equal. But does that imply no distinct roles? Notice that Mrs. White indicates clearly that Adam was to exercise the role of protector over Eve. She does not say they were to protect each other. The man's role was to protect the woman.

From what would Eve need protection in Eden? Not from physical threat, where Adam's size and strength might give him advantage. The threat in Eden was spiritual and centered on the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There, and only there, could Satan have access to the human family. And Adam was to be Eve's protector. In order for such protection to be effective, she must accept it—she must submit to his loving leadership. And the relationship of Adam and Eve "was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth."[12]

Angels "had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone."[13] But she wandered from his protection and "became the agent of Satan in working the ruin of her husband."[14]

Did Adam take his leadership duty as protector of Eve seriously? "There was a terrible struggle in his mind. He mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side."[15] Did Mrs. White imply that had Eve permitted Adam to exercise his pre-fall role of leader and protector, ruin might not have come to the human race? It would seem so. Such leadership does not deny their status as equals. But as Adam was ultimately responsible as leader and protector, he stood ready to share the consequences of Eve's sin: "He resolved to share her fate; if she must die, he would die with her. . . . He seized the fruit and quickly ate."[16]

"Adam could neither deny nor excuse his sin."[17] What sin? His sin of disobedience, including his failure to exercise his leadership role. What does the Bible say? "To Adam he [God] said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree . . . , cursed is the ground because of you'" (Gen. 3:17). This indicates that God was displeased that Adam, *before the fall,* had relinquished his role of leader and protector in listening to Eve.

One writer says that in Genesis 2-3 there is "no hint of headship of one over the other" before the fall. *But we have seen that what Genesis 2-3 and Ellen White have to say is more than just a hint of pre-fall headship.*

Any suggestion that it would have been the same if the roles played by Adam and Eve in the fall were reversed must be answered

by the fact that the inspired narrative did not tell the story that way. Before the fall the authority structure was natural, though certainly recognized by both Adam and Eve.

Headship: Applied to Marriage and Church

Is the biblical teaching of male headship and female submission applicable only to the marriage relationship and not to the church at large? Let us look at some New Testament texts.

In 1 Timothy 2:12-14 Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Although this text will be dealt with more specifically in the next chapter, it is necessary to make some observations here. First, the context of the whole letter to Timothy reveals that Paul's purpose in writing is to give instruction regarding how the life of the universal church, not just that of the Ephesian congregation, is to be directed. Second, the context of chapter two tells us that Paul is *not* talking about husbands and wives but about *men and women.* Third, his counsel focuses on the proper behavior of men and women during the worship of the congregation and is not confined only to a specific situation. Similar counsel is given in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and in 14:34-35, indicating that the counsel has universal and timeless application. Fourth, Paul bases his counsel concerning the behavior of women in worship primarily on creation, on the fact that Adam was "formed first." Therefore, the text supports the view that male headship-female submission constitute part of the pre-fall relationship of men and women, making Paul's counsel universal and timeless.

Some pro-ordinationists see Gal 3:28—"There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"—as abolishing male-female role distinctions, while they hold that male headship and female submission are still part of the marriage relationship as taught in the New Testament. But if role distinctions were part of the curse that Calvary has resolved, as pro-ordinationists believe, then the New Testament passages that teach the headship of

husbands and the submission of wives are mistaken. Can that be so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

First Timothy 3:2, which states that the pastor must be a man ("the husband of but one wife"), supports the concept of male headship in the church, not just in the marriage relationship. Paul applies the principle of male headship-female submission in marriage to the larger context of the church, telling Timothy in verses 14-15 that "I am writing these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves *in God's household, which is the church* of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (emphasis mine).

Conclusion

Some recognize the divisive nature of the women's ordination issue, but instead of calling for solutions that might require submission to Scripture, they call for "statesmanlike behavior." In other words, a political solution must be sought, such as the compromise action of the Indianapolis General Conference that disallows the ordination of women while permitting them to perform all the functions of ministry without ordination. The well-intentioned attempt to keep both sides happy has failed, because in effect it only provided the basis for further conflict.

Political solutions cannot resolve biblical issues. Bowing to the feminist agenda on ordination for women leads us away from fidelity to Scripture. As evangelical author Mary A. Kassian put it,

> Biblical feminists seek to retain an evangelical base while at the same time modifying biblical interpretation to be sympathetic to the concerns of the women's movement. However, in order to embrace both, biblical feminists need to compromise the Bible. Biblical feminism therefore has become a theological crossing point between traditional conservative evangelical theology and liberalism. The examples of the early biblical feminists bear witness to this fact. Many have crossed over to liberalism and have adopted radical feminist theology. . . .

> Biblical feminists have tried to join feminism and conservative biblical Christianity in a harmonious stream. But even though the two were forced, as it were, to flow out of the same tap, they remain inapposite. Feminism and Christianity are like thick oil and water: their very natures dictate that they cannot be mixed.[18]

This comment reminds us of Ellen White's 1864 observation that "the spirit which attends the one [the woman's rights movement] cannot be in harmony with the other [the third angel's message]. The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women."[19] The perspective of another 130 years has only confirmed that what she wrote then is true.

NOTES

1. J. I. Packer, "Let's Stop Making Women Presbyters," *Christianity Today*, February 11, 1991, p. 18.
2. *The Geography of Strabo*, tr. Horace Leonard Jones (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), 8.6.20-21. I am indebted to C. Mervyn Maxwell for pointing this out in his manuscript, "Women in the Greco-Roman World," a 1988 study paper for the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute before the convening of the Role of Women Commission.
3. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. vii.
4. Ibid., pp. vii-viii.
5. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 59.
6. Ibid., p. 58.
7. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 3:484.
8. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), p. 231.
9. Ellen G. White Letter 5, 1861, quoted in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), p. 469.
10. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:307.
11. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.
12. Ibid., p. 49.
13. Ibid., p. 53.
14. Ibid., p. 56.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
17. Ibid., p. 57.
18. Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: the Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 217.
19. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:421.

Chapter Eight

PERTINENT BIBLE PASSAGES

During the floor discussion regarding ordination of women at the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis, a delegate approached the microphone waving a fifty dollar bill above his head, saying he would give it to anyone who could show him a verse in the Bible that specifically prohibits the ordination of women. A visitor in the gallery chuckled and observed, "I could make the same offer to anyone able to show me a Bible verse specifically calling for their ordination."

Of course there are no such specific verses, but neither are there specific verses mandating abstinence from tobacco or from use of non-medicinal drugs. Yet there are principles that do apply and that can be discovered by the study of Bible passages that have bearing on the issue.

Therefore, in this chapter we will examine some pertinent Pauline passages. The primary focus will be on the source of Paul's counsel, the context in which it is given, and the principles it teaches.

We must note at the outset the way in which Paul himself describes the origin of his message: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12).

Here Paul establishes a principle of revelation that includes all he wrote, not just the message concerning the forgiveness of sin because of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. What he writes has been received "by revelation." He speaks "the truth" (Rom. 9:1). "According to the commission of God given to me," he says, "I laid a foundation . . . . Let each man take care how he builds upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10 RSV). Two

things can be done with a foundation: build on the one already laid, or ignore it and erect another. To ignore any part of the foundation laid down in the Bible is to weaken, if not destroy, that foundation. As an apostle, Paul speaks with the authority of the Lord. He says: "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him" (2 Thess. 3:14). Furthermore, what he writes is to be accepted as the command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). Paul was a very careful man, and very faithful to the revelation he received from God. He does not hesitate to let his reader know when he has no direct teaching of Jesus upon which to base what he says and gives his own inspired judgment (1 Cor. 7:12, 25).[1]

It is obvious that Paul wrote with authority, and that the early church accepted his writings as divinely given and authoritative. His writings were accepted, not because those writings agreed with contemporary culture, but because the church recognized the evidence of divine inspiration, hence their truthfulness and accuracy.

In the Pauline passages discussed below the language is not typological, figurative, symbolic, or poetic. It is clear prose. The only way Paul's words can be made to mean other than their literal intent is to invent a "principle" which appears to justify other than a literal application. Cultural conditioning lies ready at hand for the interpreter looking for a way out of a "thus saith the Lord" unacceptable to the person or the culture. Fitted into the contemporary concern for human justice and equal rights, the culture-conditioning principle appears to make sense, except for one salient fact—it obscures in a fog of clever rhetoric the literal meaning and application of Paul's words. In fact, Paul's words on this subject are much more clear than the apocalyptic passages in Daniel and Revelation that are so foundational to Adventism.

Supporters of women's ordination have made strong appeals to take a "principled approach" to the issue. Let us do so.

Galatians 3:26-28

> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves

> with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Our discussion of pertinent texts begins with this passage because feminists consider it to be the Magna Carta of women's liberation, a premier text believed to support ordination for women. Other scholars view it differently, one calling it the "hermeneutical skeleton key by which we may go through any door we choose."[2]

While the text teaches equality between the sexes, with the specific focus on being "one in Christ," the equality the passage supports is unequivocally spiritual. It is an indisputable article of the Christian faith that no one has spiritual advantage because of gender, nationality, race, or status. Everyone comes to Christ on the same terms. God's love has no favorites. People are baptized into Christ and the church, not into maleness or femaleness. Thus there is full spiritual equality for all. This is a Bible principle established for all time and for all ages.

Galatians 3:28 rests solidly upon Genesis 1-2. Man and woman were created equal in nature; they have the same basic source, God Himself who made them in His own image (Gen. 1:27). They are partners in life. Because Galatians 3:28, as well as the whole Bible, does have social and practical significance, we should consider it unjust when anyone is denied opportunities in a discriminatory way, when they have been abused and treated unfairly economically. There is no question but that women who are qualified and who are doing the same job as men should receive the same salary. Women should not be denied any opportunity or position for which they are gifted, trained, and qualified, *unless God Himself has reserved a specific role and calling for both women and men.* And if He has, that reservation cannot be considered unjust and unfair by the Christian community sworn to uphold and follow the teaching of the Bible. Such reservation and restriction cannot be judged within the church on the basis of worldly, secular points of view.

The context in which Galatians 3:28 appears tells us that the apostle is talking about salvation, not church order. In spite of the fact that it gives us no guidance whatsoever regarding roles and offices in the church, pro-ordinationists consider this text to be greater in value than those that speak of role distinctions or male

headship and female submission. But does this text cancel what Paul says elsewhere about role distinctions, headship and submission? Hardly. The same Paul who wrote "neither male nor female" wrote "the head of a woman is her husband" (1 Cor. 11:3 RSV), and "the husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23). Spiritual equality does not do away with role distinctions. On the other hand, such distinctions do not imply inferiority or superiority. Therefore, let us put to rest the notion that for women in ministry not to be ordained means they are considered inferior and that to deny them ordination is unjust and a form of oppression.

Galatians 3:28 does not teach that Calvary has abolished all role distinctions between men and women. If it did, then the principle of the wife's submission to her husband was also abolished. If role distinctions are the consequence of sin and considered evil, they are evil both in the church and in the family. But the Bible does not sustain such a position.

Clearly the context of the passage is not that of human role relationships in either church or family, but that of righteousness by faith and the believer's status before God in Christ. The Christian church has understood the text this way for centuries, and that historical fact must not be treated lightly. We should assume that the church has been right in its historic interpretation unless there are compelling exegetical and theological reasons, not cultural ones, for a new interpretation. Other texts are much more compelling in opposition to the ordination of women. They must also be considered in attempts to answer questions about qualifications for the office of spiritual headship.

It is possible that statements such as "neither . . . male nor female" were misunderstood in the early church.[3] In that event, the question is not whether Galatians 3:28 represents the "mature" Paul, but whether or not the early church's understanding was immature and required the additional instruction provided by other texts concerning male-female relationships in church and home.

1 Corinthians 11:3-10

> Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ

> is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

Most Bible scholars recognize that there are problems of interpretation with this text, and some will say that it cannot be used in the search for biblical teachings on male-female role relationships. But the important issues to which the text refers are clear. Our brief summary will provide the answer to two questions: (1) Why were women to cover their heads? and (2) What significance does this have for the church in our time?

The first thing we want to notice from the wider context is Paul's recognition of women praying and prophesying in public worship. Secondly, we note that while Christ the Son is subordinate to God the Father in role and function, they are equal in essence and being. The same principle applies to man and woman. While they are equal in essence, they have different roles in relation to each other. More specifically, the text tells us that women may exercise a speaking ministry in the church. But it also tells us that they must recognize a divinely ordained authority structure.

The head covering mentioned by Paul is to be seen as a symbol of woman's recognition of man as her head. This theological teaching is firmly rooted in Genesis 1-2. Therefore, for a woman to uncover her head while praying or prophesying in worship was viewed as an act of rebellion against that divinely established headship. Women who uncovered their heads were acting shamelessly, behaving like men, and were confusing the sexes.

Women were not prohibited from praying and prophesying in public worship, but they were to do so in ways that indicated

submission to male leadership. The head covering was a symbol of that submission.

Does Paul's upholding of this principle apply only to his time and only to the Corinthian congregation? That Paul sees his instructions as applying to "the churches of God" (v. 16) indicates a universal application. It does have significance for our time and cannot be dismissed as simply a cultural phenomenon.

Does this mean that the only way women today can demonstrate their adherence to the biblical principle of headship and submission is to cover their heads when at worship? There may be different opinions about that. But let us not lose sight of the fact that the timeless principle established by this text for every age of the church is: If women pray and prophesy in worship, they should do so in ways that indicate submission to the divinely established structure. The basic principle is that of male headship and female submission, and that principle was evidently being challenged then, as now. The principle of headship and submission is timeless, while the application of the principle may differ from age to age. There is, after all, a great deal of difference between applying social criteria to a Bible text (thus conditioning its interpretation) and establishing a timeless and universal biblical principle and applying it to contemporary social customs. Covering the head was an expression of the underlying biblical principle of male headship and female submission. It is not seen to be such today. But there are ways in which that principle can be demonstrated, such as Paul's explicit instruction, based on creation and not on contemporary culture or social custom, that in the church women are not to "have authority over" men (1 Tim. 2:12). The timeless principle that the inspired counsel invokes is that women must be willing to demonstrate acceptance of "a sign of authority." Both Christian men and Christian women should delight in doing the will of God as revealed in His Word.

The attitude of humility and submission on the part of women in worship is what is important. It is destructive of the God-ordained distinctions between men and women for women to take to themselves leadership roles which the Bible reserves for men. What is actually at stake is the loss of both masculinity and femininity.

This text indicates that the concept of male leadership is not confined to the marriage relationship. The counsel in this text suggests that the way women dress for worship services, and their deference to the male leadership of the church, is meant to indicate a visible acceptance and honoring of male headship in the church as well as in the family. Biblically speaking, male leadership is not in conflict with equality.

It should also be observed that such cultural expressions as head coverings, a kiss of greeting, or the removal of shoes in God's presence, are hardly to be considered on the same level as the relationship between male and female or husband and wife. Here the basic difference between cultural adaptation in reference to symbolic action, and cultural conditioning of well-defined biblical principles, must be noted.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-38

> As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

When one reads from chapter 11 through chapter 14, it is clear that the context is Paul's concern for the proper conducting of worship services. He begins chapter 11 with a statement concerning the relationship between men and women in that worship. His appeal is to creation, not to contemporary culture and its norms (see verses 8, 9, and 12). Chapter 14's specific instruction concludes with the verses quoted above. Thus the entire context is that of concern for the proper conducting of worship in all of the congregations of Christendom, including the roles of men and women in that worship. Paul is not speaking only of the Corinthian congregation.

Whether contemporary culture appreciates it or not, the fact is that Paul's charge to women to be silent at worship requires a voluntary act of obedient submission. It is in harmony with "the law" and is not simply Paul's own opinion. In what way is this teaching of Paul in harmony with the law of God? In another passage (1 Tim. 2:13-14), Paul himself cites two assertions from "the law" to help define the relationship of men and women: Adam was created first (Gen. 2), and Eve fell into sin first (Gen. 3). When Eve gave Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit, she acted in contradiction to her divinely ordained submission to Adam. Adam also, in accepting the forbidden fruit, acted in contradiction to his divinely ordained leadership role as a man. This relationship of male leadership and female submission was grounded in God's creative purpose and will. It represents His permanent will for the relationship between the sexes. It is, therefore, not something that can be affected by changing social custom or human ways of perceiving male-female relationships. Those who fear and love God will observe His will in this matter as in all others.

The apostle's concern is even more striking when the culture of Corinth is taken into account. His counsel is not due to a practice in Corinth or the Roman empire of keeping women in the background of social and religious life. Paul's counsel to the Corinthian congregation, living in a blatantly pagan environment, was the exact opposite of the contemporary culture. Cultural norms were to be confronted by God's revelation and commands in such a way that the life of the church was distinct from that of pagan culture.

Where did Paul get this counsel? Let's allow him to speak for himself. In speaking about the role of women in worship he may have had some opposition, even at that early date. Consequently, he was very careful in delineating the source of his instructions: "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored" (14:37-38). Surely this command of the Lord is no invention by the apostle. Paul not only indicates the divine source of his counsel concerning the submissive silence of women in worship, he adds a warning. Such a warning reveals the critical importance of the counsel.

Furthermore, in addition to this indisputable source, he appeals both to "the Law" (14:34), which is obviously the Torah or Scriptures, and to his own apostolic authority (14:36). Paul claims that anyone who is spiritually gifted, that is to say led by the Holy Spirit and having spiritual insight and discernment, will readily accept what he says as coming from the Lord and not from any other source. Neither culture nor his own personal opinion are involved. His counsel is clearly under the authority of God's revelation, where it must always remain for the church. What he says on this issue, as on any other, was not only for the Corinthian congregation. Given the context and the warning, a principle is established that has universal and timeless application, because it is for "all the congregations of the saints" (14:33).

If what Paul says here is "the Lord's command," can we legitimately assume that somehow that command was abrogated, or that Paul changed his mind, by the time he wrote Galatians 3:28 less than a year later?

Chapters 11 and 14 provide the context of Paul's concern for orderly worship, not for the social life of the congregation. Chapter 11 begins with a statement about men and women in worship. Paul appeals to the order of creation, not to contemporary culture or its norms: "for man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (11:8-9). This is also a Bible principle established for all time.

Thus the context of this passage is that of the worship life, not the social life, of the church, and the counsel comes directly from the Lord. The interpretation which says that Paul's counsel in this text was culturally conditioned and therefore limited in application, that it reflects rabbinic chauvinistic influence and is not binding today, is inconsistent with the textual evidence.

When I quoted the above text to a proponent of women's ordination, asking him how he understood it, he said: "Oh, it certainly was a command of the Lord—for Paul's day and for that culture, but not for today and for our culture." That sounds just like the reasoning of the three Lutheran theologians I talked to about the Sabbath.

Though the word "head" is not used in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, the apostle, under divine inspiration, upholds male-female role

distinctions as a universal principle. This certainly does not mean that women cannot sing, read Scripture, testify, prophecy, or pray in public. Such prohibition would contradict other Pauline teaching. The conclusion is that the restriction must be in reference to *authoritative* teaching that is a part of the pastoral *office*, the position of leadership and spiritual authority over a congregation. It is for the good of the church, and thus it cannot be interpreted as a form of feminine enslavement.

These roles do not make the man superior to the woman, nor the woman inferior to the man; rather the fulfillment of these roles makes them both faithful to God and His Word. It is a matter of allowing God to determine roles, with both men and women accepting them in faith and obedience.

Ephesians 5:22-24.

> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Though this text speaks primarily about the relationship between Christ and His church, it also establishes the universal principle of male headship and female submission in the marriage relationship.

Many proponents of women's ordination insist that the meaning of "head" is "source" rather than "authority over." However, a reputable New Testament scholar has established a well-documented and substantiated case for the latter.[4]

The love of the husband for his wife exercised in headship, and the love of the wife for her husband exercised in submission "as to the Lord," are symbolic of the relationship that exists between Christ and the church. *Because Christ is the Head and the true church is distinguished by its submission to Him, we must take seriously the principle that women should not adopt roles that God assigned to men, and that men should not adopt roles assigned to women.*

While the will of God concerning the relationship between male and female, especially within the marriage covenant, has a broad aspect and covers all society, it is especially pertinent to the church. No matter what society in general may do, the church is obligated to uphold and maintain the will of God.

There are still theologians within Protestantism who have not bowed the knee to Baal on this particular issue. One of them boldly and forthrightly writes:

> The *kephale* [headship]-structure governing the relationship between man and woman, which was given in the creation, and the command to subordination (*hypotage*), which is demanded of the woman in a unique way by this order, are in effect in the Christian Church until the Last Judgment. Were anyone to contest in teaching and preaching the factual and effective existence of this order and the factual validity of the corresponding command, he would be proclaiming a false teaching in regard to this central point with which the whole Christian message hangs together; he would be a heretic.[5]

Strong words! But strong words are called for when the full authority of Scripture is threatened.

This author says further, with specific reference to the issue of the ordination of women in ministry:

> An argument that believes it can derive a case for the ordination of women from the changed position of the woman in modern society has no validity in the church; it cannot be advanced as proof that the ordination of the woman to the pastoral office is in harmony with the subordination required of her.[6]

It is this author's conviction that being the *presiding* pastor of a congregation and being a woman are in contradiction, because it produces a hidden conflict of essential being that may not be empirically apparent for a long time, but which will take a fearful toll not only in the church but also in society. Evidence is already

mounting that the bill for abandoning God-ordained roles is coming due in American society.

1 Timothy 2:11-14

> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

The principle of headship and submission is reiterated in this text, and in this context it includes male-female relationships in the church, not just that of husband and wife. There is no substantial contextual evidence that Paul's instructions in this passage were only for married women who were dishonoring the marriage relationship.[7] Instructions regarding the behavior of Christian married women do not appear until chapter 3, verse 11, specifically for the wives of deacons. A close look at the context reveals that in 2:1-10, Paul discusses prayers of intercession and thanksgiving that are to be offered in faith and brotherhood instead of in anger and disputation. He discusses the need for modest attire on the part of women in worship. Then in verses 11-13, women are instructed to give deference to male leadership with regard to authoritative instruction in the church. Once again the context is that of instructions concerning worship order in which a woman is not to exercise spiritual authority over men.[8] In that sense she must be silent.

Does Paul mean that a woman must never speak to men at any time or that she can never speak to men in church? Certainly not. He is not talking about absolute silence, because he recognized women praying and prophesying in worship (1 Cor. 11:5). The text indicates that there is a specific situation in which women are not to teach, thus denying them a specific authority. The text says that women should keep silent when it comes to exercising spiritual authority over men within the context of the worship life of the church. What is prohibited to women is teaching in the worship

services as a part of the ecclesiastical office of pastor, which involves the exercise of spiritual authority. *Women who are asked to participate in worship services, whether by praying or exhorting, do so on the basis of the authority delegated by the male pastor who holds the ecclesiastical office and whose spiritual authority is derived from Christ.*

If, as some interpreters insist, it is only the married women who, though equal to men in terms of grace, are prohibited from public teaching and are obligated to remain subject to their husbands, then only single women should be allowed to engage in such public teaching.[9] This would hardly satisfy the demand for recognition of all women in ecclesiastical office.

In saying "I do not permit" (*epitrepo* = "I do not at all allow"), Paul is not expressing personal opinion or reflecting culture or rabbinic influence. He is exercising his apostolic authority (1:1; 2:7). What he says is based on revelational norms. He appeals to the order of creation (2:13), thus affirming the dependence of woman upon man (see 1 Cor. 11:8-9). For Paul, where did revelation end and culture or personal opinion begin? Even in the special passages already mentioned (1 Cor. 7:12, 25), he leaves us little room to doubt his certainty about the God-given apostolic authority for his counsel or his conviction about the divine origin of that counsel. Neither the Hebrew rabbis nor contemporary culture were his source, but divine revelation. Paul believes that what he says on various subjects in his letters, including the role of women in the worship life of the church, rests on God's authority. It is the Word of the Lord.

Paul establishes his apostolic authority in 1 Timothy 1:1, in which he refers to himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." (See also 2:7.) We see the seriousness with which he viewed his counsel to Timothy reflected in the reference to "this instruction" (1:18) which "some have rejected" and by so doing have "shipwrecked their faith" (1:19).

If, as some interpreters conclude, the verb translated "have authority over" really means loose sexual behavior, and prohibits Christian women from imitating pagan women teachers who hint that they are available for intimate activities, it is entirely possible that

Paul chose it in order to say that Christian women must not prostitute their role of submission. They would prostitute their proper role by not remaining submissive and exercising spiritual authority over men instead.

Verse 14, which is so offensive to so many feminists, suggests that whenever women usurp God's arrangement of male headship they are more susceptible to being led astray, which is a hindrance to their taking on a leadership role (see also 2 Cor. 11:3). What we have learned so far concerning feminism's readiness to reconstruct history and reinterpret Scripture on a secular base underscores the Spirit-inspired wisdom of Paul.

1 Timothy 3:1-4

> Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

When the church is confronted by a major issue affecting its faith and life, all the Bible texts that impinge on that issue must be studied in order to arrive at a resolution that is biblically trustworthy. Such resolution cannot rest on just one text alone. *However, one text alone may be sufficient to prevent a misinterpretation.*

The pronouns in this passage can either be translated "he" or "she," if they were to be translated without reference to the context of the entire passage. But when the whole passage is considered, the translators, if they wanted to be accurate and not misleading, had no choice but to use the masculine pronouns "he," "his," or "him." The key to the way in which the pronouns must be translated is

found in verse 2, specifically in the phrase "the husband of one wife." Whether that phrase is translated "husband of one wife" or "husband of but one wife" or "husband by the side of one wife" or "of-one-wife husband," the original language refers to a *male.*

The literal translation of the Greek is "a man of one woman." The intent of the Greek is unavoidable. Paul is talking about a man who is the husband of one woman. It is a masculine reference; therefore every preceding and succeeding pronoun within the passage referring to that individual must be translated in the masculine. All of the qualifying adjectives which follow such as "temperate, self-controlled, respectable," etc., are logically in the masculine gender. Linguistically, by no stretch of the imagination can the text be made to read "the wife of one husband," or "the person of one person." The latter, of course, would make no sense at all.

Also, Roman society was decidedly monogamist, evidencing little or no polygamy. So it is highly unlikely that the Greek phrase "husband of one wife" in this context merely prohibits polygamy for the church leader; it should not be construed as *only* requiring monogamy.

The text does not say that an overseer/bishop/elder/pastor must be a "person of one spouse." The Greek word for person is *anthropos*, which is generic and can refer to either male or female. The corresponding generic pronoun, used in verse 1, is *tis.* The *New International Version* is correct in its translation of verse 1, "if *anyone* sets his heart on being an overseer. . . ." It could also be translated "if any *person*. . . ." By contrast, the Greek word for man is *aner,* and is definitely masculine. The word Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, used in verse 2 for the person who is to be of "one wife" is *aner!* When he spoke of this qualification for the overseer, Paul was talking about a man, not a woman or a generic person. Furthermore, the Greek word for woman is *gune,* which is feminine. The word Paul used, under the Spirit's guidance, for the one who is the wife of that man is *gune!*

A careful look at the Greek of 1 Timothy 2:8 will show that Paul uses the masculine gender when he says, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer." Of whom is Paul speaking?

Clearly of men. Then in verse 9 he shifts to the feminine gender when he says, "I also want women to dress modestly."[10] Of whom does Paul speak now? Women, of course. In the rest of chapter 2 he speaks of both men and women.

Then, in 3:1-7, he reverts back to the masculine gender because he again speaks specifically of men. The intent is obvious. The usage is not generic here, as verse 2 clearly indicates. In spite of all attempts to make this text say something else, it is an unequivocal statement reserving the office of overseer/bishop/elder/pastor for men. The real issue is: Will we allow Paul to say what he means and mean what he says? Is what Paul says here only his own opinion conditioned by his background and culture, or is it part of God's inspired and infallible revelation? Is it included in what Ellen White calls the "unerring standard"? Does it represent merely Paul's own understanding of the matter, which critical scholars believe was much less enlightened than that of this century in North America? Or is it divine truth that has universal and timeless application? God does not adapt His divine instructions to meet the desires or opinions of a particular society or culture. If He did, a good case could be made for contemporary Sunday observance.

The apostle's concern is about the qualifications for the office of elder or pastor and for deacons and their wives. Clearly and unambiguously we are told that the head of a Christian congregation must be a man (*aner*), one whose qualifications for spiritual leadership in the household of God have been demonstrated (see also Titus 1:6). It is not enough that one merely possesses certain gifts or feels called. The reason given is: "If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?"

That the person exercising spiritual leadership over a congregation must be a man is a Bible principle established for all time and all ages.

When the church abides by the Word of God which says that a pastor/elder/bishop must be a man—"husband of one wife"—that church is not being unjust. It is being faithful. To insist that the faithful church is unjust in its obedience begs the question. It shifts the focus from obedience to the Word of God to human desires and cultural demands. If the Bible is the revelation of God's will and is

the Word of God, and if Jesus Christ is the believer's Lord, then the Bible is the truth and the believer is under obligation to obey it.

If, as some interpreters insist, the masculine usage in this text is irrelevant to the question of women's role in ministry but that the ability of a pastor to govern his home or family is relevant for ministerial qualifications, how shall we understand the texts studied above? On the one hand, 1 Timothy 2:11-12 requires married women (at least) to keep silent in worship and so be subject to their husbands. On the other hand, five verses later, a woman pastor's ability to govern her home and family, which presumably includes her husband, would also constitute a qualification for the ministerial office. But such a conclusion contradicts the teaching of the earlier verse as well as other New Testament texts which clearly teach that the man is head of the family and the woman is subject to him.

One more observation is required. The phrase "husband of one wife" also indicates that ideally the minister would profit from marriage in that he would thereby gain leadership experience. However, that cannot be construed to represent an absolute ideal in that there is no evidence that either Paul or Timothy were married. In fact, following his admonition to Timothy—"If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ" (4:6)—he tells him not to "let anyone look down on you because you are young" (4:12). Furthermore, in a passage dealing with the marriage relationship, Paul says "I wish that all men were as I am" (1 Cor. 7:7)—unmarried, because a married man's "interests are divided" (1 Cor. 7:34). While we do find New Testament endorsement of single men in ministry, we do not find endorsement of women, single or married, serving in the role of spiritual leader.

When Ellen G. White's views about biblical revelation and inspiration are applied to a text such as 1 Timothy 3:2, certain conclusions are unavoidable. To hold that this text is limited to Paul's time or culture is not consistent with Mrs. White's understanding of the Bible's universal and timeless application. Furthermore, the details of this verse are as important as are the general principles. The counsel is inspired, infallible, and constitutes God's revelation. The words are Paul's, framed in his mode of expression; nevertheless, the counsel is God's Word, not just Paul's word.

Therefore, this verse cannot be ignored, explained away as having been culturally conditioned, or discounted as constituting a mistake or misunderstanding by Paul. Mrs. White wrote:

> The law is God's standard, from which there must be no swerving. The will and way of God must be made paramount. That no detail may be forgotten, we must constantly peruse the Word of God. It makes a great difference to men whether they receive or reject the precepts of Jehovah. It is because many are not real students of the prophecies and the requirements found in the Bible, that they are so easily diverted to the consideration of matters of but little importance.[11]

The Church Has a Choice

We have seen that in Christian society women were given their rightful place as established at creation, and that Christian society served to confront pagan society's denigration of women. We have also seen that there were many women engaged in helping ministries in the early church, many of whom Paul highly commended, and that women and men enjoy complete spiritual equality.

However, we have also seen that women are prohibited from exercising a headship role in the congregation. A clear distinction must be made between office and function. God is calling women to ministry, but not to the leadership office in which spiritual authority is exercised over men. No doubt this is the reason why Ellen White, whose call to ministry was exceptional, did not hesitate to prophesy and exhort while never seeking ordination to the ecclesiastical office. In that sense, as well as others, her life and ministry were in harmony with Scripture.

Manfred Hauke observes:

> Abolishing subordination in a particular social sphere by no means leads to conditions of universal equality, for, as we know, things like the relationship of employer-employee, or ruler-citizen, have continued in force even after the abolition of slavery. Even on the "new earth" of the coming eon, no

> abolition of every sort of subordination can be expected. The slag of sin may very well be burnt out of the structures of society, and the worldly scale of values turned upside down, but a general equalization of the manifoldly differentiated realities of creation cannot be expected. Ontological and functional differentiation presupposes, however, headship and subordination—assuming that we do not proceed on the basis of the equalization slogans of prereflective (vulgar) Marxism.[12]

Since Paul's counsel is part of God's revelation, it would be extremely dangerous and irresponsible to ignore his prohibition of women as "overseers," rejecting his counsel on the supposed basis that it was culturally conditioned. The principle the faithful church has always used is that of discovering Scriptural meaning first, then bringing practice into harmony with it. Correct understanding precedes correct practice.

However, the ordination of women in ministry is not the basic issue we face. It is a symptom of the dramatic change in the way the contemporary church at large is beginning to look at human experience. A highly humanistic society focuses on meeting human needs and demands rather than on faithful obedience to the will of God. A serious implication for the church is that members may seek ways to circumvent the plain teaching of the Bible on this and other issues. One such way is the deculturizing of the Bible, which is an attempt to remove all so-called patriarchal elements. Where does the process stop? Who decides which parts of Scripture have value and authority?

The whole idea of deculturizing rests upon doubt and skepticism concerning the church's traditional doctrine of Scripture. It exhibits a misplaced confidence in scholarship to uncover what is truly authoritative inspired revelation.

Ellen White commented on the human tendency to judge the Word of God:

> Men in this age of the world act as if they were at liberty to question the words of the Infinite, to review his decisions and statutes, indorsing, revising, reshaping, and annulling, at their

> pleasure. If they cannot misconstrue, misinterpret, or alter God's plain decision, or bend it to please the multitude and themselves, they break it. We are never safe while we are guided by human opinions; but we are safe when we are guided by a "Thus saith the Lord." We can not trust the salvation of our souls to any lower standard than the decision of an infallible Judge. Those who make God their guide, and his word their counselor, follow the lamp of life. God's living oracles guide their feet in straight paths. Those who are thus led do not dare judge the word of God, but ever hold that his word judges them.[13]

The pastoral office is not simply functional. Preaching the gospel, baptizing, and serving Holy Communion are not just the exercise of human rights and duties. To think of the pastoral office in such a way is to do so on a purely social, cultural basis rather than on a biblical, theological basis.

Furthermore, we must view contemporary ideas of fairness critically. The so-called fairness doctrine does not apply to that which God specifically forbids. From the humanist point of view it may be unfair for a practicing homosexual to be denied access to the Kingdom of God without a life-changing transformation, but that is exactly what God's Word requires (1 Cor. 6:9-10). From the same perspective it might be considered unfair for the Lord to command Sabbath keeping, which often results in loss of employment, or to expect a poor believer to relinquish ten percent of income for the support of the ministry. But for the church such questions can never be resolved on the basis of fairness or unfairness, but on whether God has spoken.

The church always has a choice, as do individuals. What it chooses has a lot to say about the church, not necessarily about the character of God. We must look to Scripture and to Christ for the perfect revelation of His character. The church must always be in the process of sifting today's cultural norms from timeless truths or else find itself locked in the social present with no revelational foundation. If this were not so we could do as I was counseled to do more than two decades ago: leave the seventh-day Sabbath to the culture of the Jews, where so many evangelicals insist it belongs.

Conclusion

Obviously, as the Bible reveals, there is a role for women in ministry. But what is that role? This is the question the church must answer unambiguously and fearlessly. The church must be faithful enough and brave enough to resist social pressure by standing on the full authority of the Word of God, and open-minded enough to recognize that women have a significant place in ministry.

That women can assist men in ministry is without question. What we need to do is steer a careful course between two extremes. This is not an either-or question. Neither cultural prejudice nor cultural bias can form the basis for the solution, but Scripture alone. Faithfulness to the Bible may require a confrontation with contemporary culture. While we Adventists seek in our mission work to call all of Christianity back to biblical ideals, we must listen to those ideals closely ourselves. We need to move toward the establishment of fully recognized positions in ministry for women, positions legitimatized by title, license, salary, and retirement security, but which do not compromise the biblical principles mentioned above, do not militate against the integrity and inviolability of the family, and are acceptable to the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist church.

When the biblical principles of male headship and female submission are applied, the conclusion is that the ordained male minister derives his authority from Christ and shares his ministry with the woman who may be on the ministerial staff by delegating responsibility. In this way he exercises his leadership role, and she her submissive role, in the fulfillment of ministerial function. It must be noted that the ordination of women in ministry cannot be accomplished without compromising the Bible, especially those passages discussed in this chapter.

Finally, in order to be fair to the apostle Paul, we must note that his position on women in ministry was not based on the misconception that women are inferior, *but on a particularly high estimation of their uniqueness and value as women.* If women have been devalued, that tragic development cannot be attributed to Paul, but to men in subsequent generations who have not appreciated the value of women as he did.

NOTES

1. Concerning 1 Cor. 7:10, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord)," the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), vol. 6, p. 708, says, "Inasmuch as Jesus had spoken specifically on this subject the apostle could make such a reference. When there was no specific instruction from Jesus, the apostle gave fresh, inspired counsel." Concerning 1 Cor. 7:12, "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)," the *Commentary* says Paul "was moved by the Holy Spirit in giving the counsel that follows, but he did not base his words on any previously recorded statement that Jesus had made" (p. 709). Concerning 1 Cor. 7:25, "I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy," the *Commentary* says, "The apostle has no direct previous statement from Scripture or from the teachings of Jesus for his authority in regard to what he is about to say on the subject of the unmarried. . . . This fact does not in any way lessen the force of, or remove the inspiration from, the instruction that follows on this subject. Paul thus expresses his authority for the opinion that he is about to give. . . . What he wrote was to be accepted as the will of God concerning the matter under discussion" (p. 713).

2. Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?" in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelson (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 161.

3. Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, pp. 369-370.

4. See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity" (pp. 124-139), and Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of Kephale ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies" (pp. 425-468), in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). Grudem did an exhaustive survey of 2,336 examples in Greek literature wherein *kephale* means "head" or "authority over." His conclusion was that in no instance did the word have the meaning of "source" or "origin." Heinrich Schlier in his article "*Kephale*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1974), vol. 3, states that *kephale* is used in the Septuagint "for the head or ruler of a society" (p. 675), implying "one who stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being" (p. 679). See also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women In The Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), pp. 111-137, and *The Marriage Covenant* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), pp. 120-157.

5. Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 31.

6. Ibid., p. 32.

7. This interpretation is suggested by Sharon Marie Hodgin Gritz in her unpublished doctoral dissertation *A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986). Gritz's conclusion regarding this Pauline

passage is that "The normative principle underlying 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is that marriage qualifies a married woman's ministry" (p. 233). This conclusion creates more problems than it supposedly resolves. If Paul was forbidding only married women in ministry from exercising teaching authority over their husbands, the following perplexing questions arise: (1) Can this not be viewed as a form of discrimination against married women? (2) Can a single woman exercise such authority over both single and married men? (3) Can a married woman exercise such authority over single men as well as men other than her own husband? (4) Can a married woman pastor a congregation in which her husband holds membership? (5) Can a married woman serve on committees which exercise authority in the larger church context in which her husband holds membership?

8. Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, in their book *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), make the observation that the Greek word *authentein*, which has been traditionally translated "have authority" in this text, "was most certainly being used by the second century C.E. [A.D.] in a sense that implied dominance" (p. 90). They also observe that "By the second century B.C.E. [B.C.], *authentes* was being used to denote an originator or instigator" (p. 99). They then choose the earlier meaning and translate verse 12 as "I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man." Obviously this is a biased choice. It would be more plausible to recognize that Paul understood the term to convey the meaning that it had during the New Testament era.

9. See N. J. Hommes, "Let Women be Silent in Church," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 1969, pp. 5-22. Hommes concludes that "Here in 1 Timothy 2:12, therefore, the apostle in no way at all is thinking of a prohibition against women in [ecclesiastical] office. What he is concerned about here . . . is the preservation of the ideal of the Christian housewife in her public conduct in the *ecclesia* [the assembled congregation]. He gives here a message concerning public worship and female decorum which is confirmed by 1 Timothy 2:9. In all his letters Paul remains true to himself wherever he touches on the question of women. The woman in the *ecclesia* must not take part in 'teaching,' that is, in discussing things [with] each other and admonishing one another, because that would be the same as playing the boss over her husband, and thus completely contrary to her calling to remain silent, quiet, and modest in her conduct" (p. 20). Yes, Paul remains true to himself in all he says about women, but not along the lines Hommes suggests. The above interpretation ignores what Paul actually *says*, which is that a woman, any woman, married or single, is not permitted to "have authority over a man."

10. In view of the fact that Paul speaks elsewhere of women praying in church, it would be obvious that the "holy hands" applies also to them, and that men who pray and prophesy must also dress modestly. Nevertheless, we must recognize the usage of the male and female genders in the original Greek of this passage.

11. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 5, 1907, p. 9.

12. Hauke, p. 354.

13. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 21, 1899, p. 113.

Chapter Nine

THE ICEBERG IN OTHER WATERS

Besides the Seventh-day Adventist church, other denominations are struggling with the related issues of the Bible's authority, its interpretation, and the question of women's ordination. A brief summary of that struggle in the Anglican-Episcopal, Lutheran, and Southern Baptist churches follows.

The Anglican-Episcopal Church: The Road to Schism

No greater example of polarization over biblical authority and interpretation in relation to the women's ordination issue is available than that of the Anglican-Episcopal Church.[1]

A major turning point within Anglicanism in North America came in 1964, when the St. Louis General Convention changed the wording of Canon Law regarding the status of deaconesses from "appointed" to "ordered," conferring on them what Anglicans call "holy orders." On this basis Bishop James Pike of California recognized a woman as deacon (part of the Anglican clergy) by virtue of her prior ordination as deaconess. In 1970 the General Convention made further changes in Canon Law, declaring deaconesses to be within the diaconate, thus ratifying their ordination as deacons. Following that action, some bishops in North America began unilaterally to ordain women priests.

Thus by 1973 the situation of women in ministry was quietly changing. Gradually, however, an awakening to the implications of what was happening began to develop, and opposition increased as

the debate shifted from abstract questions about female ministerial ability to theological questions.

In July 1974, three retired bishops ordained eleven women in Philadelphia, though they were requested not to do so by the Presiding Bishop and the bishop of the diocese of Pennsylvania. This flagrant action brought the matter to center stage, as it challenged the authority structure and ultimately served to alter the face of the Episcopal Church.

By 1976 the church was sharply divided. It was recognized that if the General Convention of 1976 authorized ordination of women, "the often-hinted at question of schism in the church will most likely have to be dealt with."[2]

Following the General Convention's affirmative vote, thirty-eight bishops and many others, saying their hands were tied by truth, signed a statement that the vote meant nothing; they would remain in the church as conscientious objectors but never recognize the priesthood of a woman.

Unable to live with the General Convention's decision, 1,750 Episcopalians met in St. Louis in November, 1977, to begin the formation of a new Anglican-Episcopal denomination. Two months later, four men were consecrated as the new denomination's first bishops. They led more than 25,000 members in more than seventy parishes, who left the established church and organized the Anglican Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, resentment continued among many who did not leave the established church, and a growing number were "troubled by the mounting pressures to permit ordination of avowed homosexuals."[3] One bishop remarked: "We are on the edge of lawlessness. Never again will this house [of bishops] be able to discipline any of its members on any question."[4]

One of the tragic elements of the trauma and punishment Episcopalians inflicted upon themselves over this issue was the lack of firm and determined leadership from the Presiding Bishop when it was most needed. At the October, 1977, meeting of the house of Bishops, he exploded a bombshell when, in his opening address, he announced that he remained unconvinced that women have a place in the priesthood, and that he would neither ordain a woman nor

participate in the consecration of a woman bishop. The other bishops were incredulous at the spectacle of the Presiding Bishop declaring himself in violation of what had by then become Canon Law. His prior public neutrality constituted dereliction of duty in the face of his church's anguish. He would have done his church the best service had he stated his position in Minneapolis unequivocally and been prepared to take the consequences, which would probably have been defeat in the election of the Presiding Bishop. Too late he found the courage to speak up when the specter of schism had become a reality. Too late he was willing to declare himself in order to move the church to a position in harmony with Scripture. The *Christian Century* commented: "This action is typical of the failure of ordained church leaders to accept the responsibility for their actions and to act decisively in setting direction in the church."[5]

In spite of their incredulity and the leadership crisis precipitated by the Presiding Bishop, the House of Bishops did not request his resignation, choosing instead to interpret his statement as a gesture of reconciliation toward those who had chosen to leave the church. In addition to the emerging issue concerning the ordination of homosexual priests, which the House of Bishops failed to address aggressively (probably because the action to ordain women removed the hermeneutic which would allow denial), the bishops faced the deeper problem of how to lead a church turning toward pluralism. In refusing to act on the homosexuality issue they did in fact act, for ordained homosexuals were left free to function. This poses the question of how any institution can survive if its leaders do not uphold its basic tenets.

The belated willingness of the Presiding Bishop to be martyred for the sake of unity sounded hollow and, of course, failed, as it was bound to.

The 1985 General Convention elected a more liberal Presiding Bishop, approved the consecration of a woman bishop should one be elected, and passed a resolution stating that no one should be denied rights or status in the church because of, among other things, sexual orientation. Many saw this as a foot-in-the-door for the eventual ordination of homosexual priests. What accounted for the extreme liberal swing? The laity, bishops, and many theologians

had become more concerned with social justice and human rights than with commitment to the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Advocates of ordination for women and gays claimed that relying on Episcopal doctrinal history and biblical interpretation to deny such ordinations stifles the Spirit. Opponents were of the opinion that the Spirit does not lead the church in ways that are contrary to Scripture's teaching, that the Holy Spirit must be distinguished from other spirits. What should be glaringly obvious about these two positions is that they are incompatible, irreconcilable, and divergent. They serve to alert us to the need for extreme caution.

The controversy in the Anglican-Episcopal Church has certainly been moving toward a climax. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, enthroned on April 19, 1991, added fuel to the fire of controversy over the women's ordination issue by stating that "The idea that only a male can represent Christ at the altar is a most serious heresy." His statement was cheered by liberals, while conservatives were enraged at this condemnation of the position held conscientiously by at least one-third of the clergy in the Church of England.[5]

Robert K. Johnston, who is not an Anglican, is right in his observation that "behind the apparent differences in approach and opinion regarding the women's issue are opposing principles for interpreting Scripture, i.e., different hermeneutics. Here is the real issue facing evangelical theology as it seeks to answer women's questions."[6]

On November 11, 1992, the Anglican Church in Great Britain voted to ordain women priests. For the Anglican Church this may be considered to have been inevitable.

The Lutheran Church: Sweden and the United States

A survey of the bitter struggle and controversy in the 1950s within the Lutheran State Church of Sweden, and later among the Lutheran churches in the U.S.A., presents further vivid examples of the potential for schism inherent in the issues of biblical authority and women's ordination.

Sweden

In Sweden, the problem was compounded by the fact that the church has close, deeply rooted historical ties with the State, which was a major factor in bringing the ordination of women issue to a conclusion, albeit a conclusion that, for many, was far from satisfactory.

Given the close relationship between church and state in Sweden, it is not surprising that the issue of ordaining women arose in Parliament in 1923, though no substantive action was taken. After Sweden's equal rights law was passed in 1945, however, Parliament requested a new study. The subsequent report of an appointed study commission became the basis for the debates and actions of the Church Assemblies of 1957 and 1958.

When the Parliamentary commission's report was published, in which the majority of its members favored the ordination of women, the following statement was signed by all but one of the professors of New Testament exegesis at the Universities of Uppsala and Lund:

> We the undersigned declare herewith as our definite opinion resting on careful research that to introduce to the church a ministry of so-called women priests would constitute a departure from faithful obedience to Holy Scripture. Both Jesus' choice of his apostles and Paul's words about the place of women in the congregation are built on principle and are independent of time-bound circumstances and views. The current proposal of allowing women to enter the priesthood of the Church of Sweden must therefore be said to entail serious exegetical obstacles.[7]

The report of the Parliamentary commission went to all thirteen dioceses of the Church of Sweden and was rejected by twelve. *The issue was between those who saw the Bible as literally normative, and those who believed that only the spirit of the New Testament was critical.* The latter believed the Bible required reinterpretation if the Holy Spirit were to be able to speak to the modern world through the church.

In contrast to the Anglican-Episcopal experience, opponents of women's ordination in the Lutheran Church of Sweden made little use of arguments from church tradition, an omission we would expect from conservative Lutherans. Concern was that arguments be biblical and deal with all relevant texts. Supporters of ordination, on the other hand, argued that "the tradition within the church depends on the Holy Spirit. The church is the place where the Holy Spirit renews the tradition and finds pathways to the future."[8]

In spite of these differences, both sides agreed that the Bible is authoritative, but they interpreted it in divergent and incompatible ways. No doubt it was a shock to many laymen, pastors, and bishops to discover that such a divergence in methods of interpretation existed within the Church of Sweden. The issue of women's ordination forced that divergence to the surface.

Having been elected along political rather than ecclesiastical lines, and in view of the very vocal secular press on the women's ordination issue, it was a foregone conclusion that the delegates to the 1958 Church Assembly would ratify the bill adopted by Parliament. The ordination of women became the law of the land. How was that possible with such united scholarly conviction standing in the way? The answer, of course, lies in the nature of the relationship between church and state in Sweden. However, opposition and division concerning the issue continued within the church in spite of a conscience clause adopted by the Church Assembly which was designed to protect those who could not conscientiously support the ordination of women. As far as Parliament was concerned, the issue was no longer the ordination of women, which became law in 1958, but whether the church would act on the basis of the equal rights law of 1945 and repeal the conscience clause.

For the church and its thinkers, the problem was to find a way (though it was hardly likely) to interpret the relevant Pauline texts so that it would be possible to live in two worlds: the world of a State dominated by militant secularism, and the world of Lutheran-Protestant adherence to *sola scriptura.* Politically the tendency has been to elect and consecrate bishops who are willing to ordain women.

Retired conservative bishop Bo Giertz, in commenting on the situation in the Lutheran Church of Sweden, said:

> There prevails great uncertainty about what the authority of the Word of God means and to what it obliges us. These are the consequences of long-lasting maladies within the church that we experience today.... The concession that the church gave the state in 1958 has given many the idea that everything in the church's teaching is relative and negotiable and that we in the church will finally have to conform to public opinion. We have since 1958 really experienced a downward slide within the church concerning both Christian faith and Christian life that nobody believed was possible at the beginning of the fifties.[9]

The United States

Three Lutheran church bodies in the United States have been ordaining women to ministry for nearly twenty years—the Lutheran Church in America (LCA),[10] the American Lutheran Church (ALC),[11] and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Theologically, these Lutheran churches were the most liberal among Lutherans in North America. In 1988-89, this theological compatibility made possible the merger of these three churches, forming the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), now the largest Lutheran body in North America. The early years of the ELCA have been filled with economic, administrative, and theological strife.

Prior to this merger the largest Lutheran church in the world, with headquarters in North America, was the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), with 4 million plus members in 33 countries. With over 2.6 million members in North America, it was the second largest among Lutheran churches in North America, operating seventeen colleges and seminaries with 8,000 students. It was not involved in any of the mergers mentioned above.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s a doctrinal controversy developed in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In that instance the LCMS did not opt for theological pluralism, acting instead to excise what it believed to be a threat to its belief and mission.

In November 1970, the president of the church appointed a fact-finding committee to investigate the theological situation at the

church's seminary in St. Louis. Reaction was varied, even though this action was in harmony with the spirit of the "Formula of Concord," one of the major Lutheran confessional statements, in which the reformers clearly stated their intent not to yield any Scriptural truth for the sake of outward harmony:

> From our exposition friends and foes may clearly understand that we have no intention . . . to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. . . . We have a sincere delight in and a deep love for true harmony and are cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same. We desire such harmony as will not violate God's honor, that will not detract anything from the truth of the Holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance.[12]

May God help the church of today to be as faithful and courageous, and to recover the Reformation spirit and commitment to the full authority of Scripture!

The fact-finding committee identified a number of views disturbing to the LCMS being taught at the seminary, views such as: the Bible is not to be recognized as a form of revelation but simply a human, and therefore a fallible, record of revelation; the inspiration of the Bible does not necessarily have to do with its historicity; most of the book of Genesis should be considered theological rather than historical, especially the first three chapters, as they contain spiritual rather than literal historic truth. The gospel message of the New Testament was held to be normative, subverting the view that the entire Bible is to have normative authority. There was strong commitment to the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation, which leads to the conclusion that many of the stories in the Old Testament are not historical. The interpreter must decide whether or not the original writer intended his account to be historical, a very subjective approach to interpretation.

It was held that miracle stories were not historical but were simply literary devices used to illustrate a theological point. Even the words of Jesus were not to be taken seriously, because many of His alleged words recorded in the gospels were never really spoken by Him. Rather, they were additions or interpretations by the Christian community.

Few Old Testament prophecies were seen to point to Jesus Christ. Most of the Messianic prophecies were said to refer to someone living at the time the prophecy was penned. Old Testament believers, therefore, were not saved by the Christ who was to come.

The effect of such a use of the historical-critical method was indeed serious, as it eroded both the authority of the text and confidence in it, introducing uncertainty into the Christian faith. This approach to the Bible, the fact-finding committee concluded, constituted false doctrine of the Bible, because it denied biblical authority as the Reformation had understood it (*sola scriptura*).

The use of the historical-critical method inevitably leads to the conclusion that the teachers of the church need not teach in accordance with the confession of the church, because the method assumes that there are contradictory theologies in the Bible and no unity or harmony of content. Therefore, the inevitable corollary for historical-critical interpreters is the demand for wide theological latitude.

With such a doctrine of Scripture and such a method of interpretation, it was easy for many of those Lutheran scholars to conclude that the apostle Paul's teachings, especially in the areas of ethics and church order, were culturally conditioned. Their method leads to the conclusion that, in many instances, the contemporary church and contemporary persons are not bound by what Paul has said. Thus, in relation to the ordination of women question, Galatians 3:28 is seen as valid for all time, but not 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Furthermore, the gospel and not the whole of Scripture is considered to be the norm for deciding for or against the ordination of women in ministry.

The fact-finding committee recommended swift and decisive action which, in 1974, brought about the exodus of most of the faculty and student body from the St. Louis seminary. They allied

themselves with liberal Lutheran perspectives and established Seminex (Seminary-in-exile), which soon merged with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a major seminary of the LCA and now a major ministerial training school for the ELCA.

While some hoped that graduates of Seminex would be called to pastor LCMS congregations, that hope was dashed when most of the congregations remained loyal to the church and its theology. Little or no evidence of the controversy remains. A new faculty, which the church considers to be theologically stable, has been functioning since the late 1970s in the St. Louis seminary, which today has more than 700 students.

The theological conservatism of the LCMS, and consequently its method of interpreting the Bible (its seminaries have rejected the historical-critical method), has determined its position on the ordination of women in ministry.

Perhaps the most important statement concerning this issue in the LCMS is "Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod September 1985." In the introduction it is stated:

> The Commission seeks in this report to outline and integrate two themes clearly presented in the Word of God: 1) the positive and glad affirmation of woman as a person completely equal to man in the enjoyment of God's unmerited grace in Jesus Christ, and as a member of His Body, the church, and 2) the inclusion of woman (as well as man) in a divinely mandated order which is to be reflected in the work and worship life of the church. *The proper correlation of these two Biblical teachings is crucial if the church's thinking on this topic is to be determined by the Holy Scriptures and not by the dictates of cultural demands* (John 8:31).[13]

The report concludes with the following:

> Thus, the Christian community will affirm the unique and differing gifts of women, seeking ways to enlist them more fully

> in the church's life and work. But God did not call His church into being and give gifts to His people so that they would be concerned about how they might become the greatest in the Kingdom. Since the life of every Christian is to be characterized by obedience and submission on some level, any demand for "rights" and "power" is inappropriate. The Commission believes that a more precise understanding of the Biblical teaching about the service of women in the church will move further reflection on the topic to its appropriate level—how all members of the church can serve our Lord and one another within the order He has established. On this level there is no thought of inferiority or superiority, of rule and domination.

The following news item appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1986, reporting the determined continuance of this biblical position by the LCMS:

> Delegates representing 2.6 million Lutherans in the Midwest took less than five minutes this week to decide that women cannot be ordained as pastors. The more than 1,100 delegates attending the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod made the decision by voting in a show of hands. The action followed a vote approving a resolution saying women can serve as officers and as members of boards and committees as long as it does not violate "the order of creation" by usurping authority over men.

It was the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation that brought about this unhappy controversy in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The church recognized that it stood at a crossroad concerning the interpretation of the Bible and the implications interpretation has for both the message and mission of the church. The Protestant world was watching very carefully. Which way would the LCMS go? It chose courageously to reject the historical-critical approach to Bible interpretation and to uphold its long-held views concerning the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Bible as Word of God, and to reaffirm the Reformation understanding of *sola scriptura.*

Many interested observers of the Lutheran scene have been pleased to note that this was the first time a major Protestant denomination in North America successfully resisted a liberal trend and remained true to its founding doctrines. It was a victory welcomed and hailed by conservative Christians, proving that theological liberalism can be defeated when the constituency of a church is devoted to its historic doctrines.[14] It provided hope and encouragement for the conservative element in the Southern Baptist Convention when that church faced a similar crisis in the 1980s, and it should do the same for Seventh-day Adventists dedicated to the full authority of the Bible.

The Southern Baptist Convention (Church): Its Great Controversy[15]

The dramatic struggle (referred to by one writer as the "Great Controversy") that has recently rocked the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC),[16] America's largest Protestant church with over 14.6 million members, provides valuable insights and warnings for the Seventh-day Adventist church. The SBC has been struggling with issues strikingly similar to those emerging in the Seventh-day Adventist church, especially as they relate to the authority of the Bible, the interpretation of the Bible, and the ordination of women.

The controversy has not been between conservatives and liberals, but between conservatives and moderates. It is not a struggle between those who uphold and those who reject the authority of the Bible. Both sides confess faith in the Bible's authority. However, moderates have accepted many of the findings and methods of modern critical scholars. The conservatives are convinced that the moderates represent a deviation from what Southern Baptists historically have believed about Scripture and its interpretation. Moderates, on the other hand, believe they represent progress in an attempt to make the church more relevant to contemporary life.

A major difference between conservatives and moderates is that moderates believe unity is based on a common mission, while conservatives believe it is based on common beliefs. Moderates promote loyalty to the church while conservatives promote loyalty

to Bible doctrine. As one would expect at this stage of the controversy, moderates promote unity amidst diversity—a euphemism for theological pluralism. When it comes to preaching, conservatives prefer exposition of the Bible, while moderates tend to include the latest in the social sciences and other fields of investigation. Moderate preaching tends to be ambiguous and non-confrontational. The results are seen in the baptismal statistics—low for moderates and high for conservatives. There appears to be a linkage in the SBC between strong biblical theology, aggressive evangelism, and church growth.

Clearly, the views of both groups regarding biblical authority and interpretation influence attitudes toward most issues faced by the denomination, including the ordination of women. Moderates favor it, while conservatives do not. Moderates support state and national laws against racial discrimination but are not as adamant when it comes to laws regarding sexual morality. They see those who call for religious and moral revival and reformation as threats to society.

Up to 1986, the moderates did their best to convince the church that the Bible was not the issue. But conservatives dug in their heels and pressed the Bible issue, winning majorities on major boards and agencies of the church. Finally, moderates admitted that "Theology is at the heart of The Controversy in the SBC."[17] The battle has been fierce. Both sides are guilty of character assassination, the spreading of misinformation, and raw power politics.

However, the controversy in the SBC is testimony to the fact that when concerned people rise up and get involved, they can impact significantly the direction their church is taking. It reveals that, together with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Southern Baptist Convention has been able seriously to resist, if not halt, the trend away from a conservative biblical theology, a trend that has plagued much of Protestantism since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The basic issues in the controversy are: the doctrine of biblical inspiration, the interpretation of the Bible, unity amidst diversity, and the implications of these for faith and mission.

What do conservative Southern Baptists believe about the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy? They do not believe that the

Bible was transmitted by God like one person would dictate to another. They believe that the intelligence, emotions, personality, and skills of each Bible writer came into play. Sometimes those writers did draw material from other written and oral accounts. And they freely used metaphor and other literary forms, which means that some parts of the Bible are to be taken literally and other parts figuratively. The grammar and the context will help to determine which is which. However, it is the fact that the Bible writers wrote under divine inspiration that makes what they wrote infallible and without error. The SBC has always believed that when the Bible speaks theologically, spiritually, historically, and scientifically it does so correctly.

Among moderates there are wide differences of opinion, which complicates matters for conservatives. Generally speaking, however, moderates believe that the Bible's authority does not depend on its being without error but upon the nature and authenticity of its message, though in details it is not without error and mistakes.

In other words, while conservatives and moderates both accept the divine-human nature of the Bible, conservatives put more weight on the divine side and moderates on the human side. For conservatives, divine inspiration protected the Bible from error. For moderates, human weakness introduced error into the biblical material—which means, in practical terms, that biblical material was often conditioned by the culture or by educational, environmental, and/or personal influences on the writer himself.

It is most interesting, as James C. Hefley observed, that "the present controversy was over four years old [in the SBC] before any leader on the 'moderate' side would speak to the real issue in the controversy."[18] The real issue was, of course, the Bible—its authority, its inspiration, the method of interpreting it, and the implications of these things for faith and mission. At the heart of the controversy was a conservative drive to return the SBC to the belief that the Bible was truth without any mixture of error.

Perhaps this is why proponents of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church have been reluctant to agree that it is a biblical-theological issue and have done their best to keep it in the socio-cultural arena. Waving the socio-cultural flags of justice-

injustice, superiority-inferiority, and human equality, is an attempt to win the sympathy vote. Recognizing women's ordination as a biblical-theological issue would inevitably expose the fact that the Seventh-day Adventist church is also faced with a crisis concerning the authority of the Bible and how to interpret it.

None of this happens in a philosophical vacuum. Up until about 200 years ago there were few serious questions concerning the authority of the Bible from within the Christian community. The absolute truthfulness of the Bible was assumed. But the ground was laid for such a struggle over biblical authority in the Protestant churches by Renaissance humanism, Western philosophy, and the emerging sciences and materialism of Western cultures. Ideas such as the freedom of man to develop morality from within, no absolute right or wrong, good or evil, and a subjectivity in which religion was related to human feelings rather than objective truth, were part of that philosophical perspective. Human beings were considered innately good; hence, the biblical doctrine of sin was rejected.

By the late 18th century the idea had appeared that the Bible was to be examined critically like any other human book. And by the end of the 19th century, Darwin's theory of evolution was part of the philosophical framework. Heavily influenced by this philosophical barrage, Germany's theologians developed higher criticism, or what is termed the historical-critical method of interpretation.

Soon after World War I, the battle for the Bible began in American Protestantism. That battle involved how the Bible was to be interpreted. The historical-critical method was penetrating the educational centers and impacting theology and doctrine. It was referred to as "the poison."

By 1985 the conflict in the SBC was so intense, so deep, that a Peace Committee was established for the purpose of discovering the exact source of the conflict and making recommendations toward reconciliation.

During the 1987 St. Louis convention of the SBC, the conservative Pastors' Conference attracted 10,000 attendees. Moderate groups such as The Forum, Women in Ministry, and Campus Ministers could not draw even half that many. The pendulum was

obviously swinging back toward Baptist orthodoxy as conservatives won majorities on boards and agencies.

It remained for the conservatives to take bold moves during the ensuing year, making their weight felt on those boards and agencies. This, however, did not happen without howls from moderates, who complained that the conservatives were imposing their standards on the whole church.

The moderate faculty of one seminary organized a chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Their slogan was academic freedom, by which was meant the freedom to teach anything, even what did not harmonize with the beliefs of the church. Their confessional responsibility as churchmen was virtually ignored. It was announced that the faculty would not sign the Baptist Faith and Message statement, the SBC equivalent of our Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. It is obvious that the AAUP chapter was working at cross-purposes to the faith of the Southern Baptist Church.

Of course, the bottom line is which view of Scripture and its interpretation will prevail. Divergent views on such basic matters cannot be maintained while at the same time insisting that unity amidst doctrinal diversity is possible. It can never be simply a matter of agreeing to disagree, because diverse ways of seeing and interpreting the Bible influence in one way or another the very message to be preached to the world. Moderates in any church would like to convince conservatives that unity amidst diversity, or theological pluralism, poses no threat. Conservatives, however, are not buying, for they know that in reality it is a step toward liberalism.

The SBC president's address to the 1987 convention climaxed the swing back to orthodoxy. He made it plain that the SBC was a mission- and evangelism-oriented church whose basis for unity was doctrinal, not functional. The church's mission and doctrine rest upon the Bible as the written Word of God. Obviously for any such church, doubts concerning the historicity and authority of the Bible undermine mission and evangelism.

The president recognized that whereas functional diversity can be peacefully maintained, doctrinal diversity leads only to division.

Strong political activity within a mission-message oriented church is inevitable when there is theological diversity. There will be a struggle for dominance. In what other way can the full authority of the Bible be maintained than for conservatives to stand up and be heard, supporting the election to important offices of people who uphold that authority? Fairness is never the issue when the full authority of the Bible is in jeopardy. Conservatives in every denomination have history on their side when they oppose the devastation caused to evangelism and church growth by the abandonment of biblical infallibility.

Jubilation in 1987 over having swung the denomination around (a struggle consuming an entire decade) was followed by a call to establish 13,000 new congregations by the year 2000 and to baptize a million converts each year. In the U.S.A.!

By 1990, as the issues became clearer, many who had been on the sidelines began to take their stand with the conservatives. An ever broadening base was becoming apparent, reflecting the grassroots conservatism in the pews. While theologians, pastors, and administrators were arguing and debating the full authority of the Bible, most of the laity were quietly believing it and sharing it.

Organized women's work in the SBC had begun in 1871, becoming the Woman's Missionary Union in 1890. By the time of the Kansas City convention in 1984, the "women in ministry" lobby was militant, supporting the moderates' call for diversity. However, conservatives managed to pass a resolution against the ordination of women on the grounds that to carry out such ordinations would be a violation of the biblical principle of female submission.[19]

"Like no other previous debate in SBC history, a decade of intense controversy has left the denomination disoriented in its mission and uncertain about its future."[20] Conservatives would certainly disagree, confident that the SBC has successfully avoided disorientation, returned to its roots, and can look forward with confidence. However, while schism has not yet occurred, fragmentation has.

There are those who believe that schism and fragmentation produce the same results. By 1989 it was being reported that the denominational budget had zero growth for the first time in its history, and numerical growth was minimal. Doctrinal and theo-

logical consensus had virtually disappeared, and in the opinion of some there was no longer a center around which to unite. Moderates blamed this on the conservative resurgence, while conservatives held moderate loss of faith in a pure Bible responsible.

While the Southern Baptist Church's problems are not over, clearly the church is strong and growing. The moderate splintering has affected the main body's finances much less than predicted (about 3% of the total cooperative funds). Since 1990 the church has grown by over a thousand congregations to more than 38,000 and continues to add an average of 5.4 new churches each week. Membership is at an all-time high, over 15 million. The rate (not just the number) of baptisms increased four years in a row (1988-1991), and both the baptisms and church starts of its foreign missions are at record levels. Enrollment in Southern Baptist seminaries is up 8%.[21] These are not characteristics of a church adrift, divided, or unsure of its message.

No matter how the Bible's inspiration is described or what terms are used to articulate it, the controversy in the Southern Baptist Church exposes the importance of whether the Bible is allowed full or only limited authority. That issue is directly related to methods of Bible interpretation, which in turn have implications for other issues affecting the life of any church that claims the Bible as its final arbitrator.

Can it be concluded that this particular controversy would never have developed had the SBC rejected the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation before it permeated the church's schools?

Conclusion

Those who think and write on the subject of women in ministry, particularly the issue of women's ordination, must come to it with convictions about biblical inspiration and biblical interpretation. They examine, evaluate, and understand all data and materials in light of those convictions. Each one's understanding is shaped by convictions about the Bible. But how have those convictions been formed? Have they been formed on the basis of

the Bible, on *sola scriptura*, or on the basis of philosophy, culture, and/or atheistic or humanistic views? On the basis of a scientific world-view, some in every church will find it easy to identify what they see as new and beneficial in culture as the work of the Holy Spirit while rejecting the past as out of harmony with the will of God; thus they do not hesitate to reject Scripture itself by a radical reinterpretation.

(A three-chapter, expanded and detailed study of this chapter's topic is available, tracing more fully the relationship between biblical authority, interpretation, and women's ordination in these three denominations. Send U.S. $5.00 to POINTER Publications, 611 Niemela Rd., Wakefield, MI 49968.)

NOTES

1. The Church of England is known in Great Britain as the Anglican Church, in Canada as the Anglican Church of Canada, and in the U.S.A. as the Episcopal Church. Though they are independent of each other, they have very close doctrinal and ecclesiastical ties. The Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. has its own Presiding Bishop, while the Archbishop of Canterbury presides over the Church of England and is titular head of all Anglican-Episcopalians.

2. Michael P. Hamilton and Nancy S. Montgomery, eds., *The Ordination of Women Pro and Con* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1975), p. 165.

3. *Christianity Today*, November 4, 1977, p. 46.

4. Ibid., p. 47.

5. *Christian Century*, October 16, 1977, p. 1052.

5. *Christianity Today*, April 8, 1991, p. 71.

6. Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 50.

7. Brita Stendahl, *The Force of Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 69.

8. Ibid., p. 72.

9. Ibid., p. 12.

10. The Lutheran Church in America was formed in 1962 by the merger of four Lutheran bodies. I was a seminary student during the time the merger documents were produced (1958-61). I can still remember a seminary professor saying, upon reading the statement of doctrine concerning the inspiration and authority of the Bible, that the church had taken a step from which it would never recover.

11. The American Lutheran Church was formed in 1962 by the merger of four other Lutheran bodies.

12. "Formula of Concord," Solid Declaration, Article XI, in the *Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 632.

13. Emphasis mine.

14. It is of interest to note that this conservative church has more black members than any other Lutheran church and has helped more than 20,000 Southeast Asians settle in the U.S.A. It has successfully begun more than 100 new congregations each year for many years, which is roughly two-thirds more than the total yearly new congregations of all other U.S. Lutheran churches combined. Lay involvement in ministry is high, with women comprising about 42% of professional workers.

15. I am indebted to James C. Hefley's four volumes, entitled *The Truth in Crisis*, for much of the information in this section.

16. Because of the confusion that may exist over the meaning of Southern Baptist Convention and the word "convention" used to denote annual meetings of the denomination, I will use Southern Baptist Church in reference to the denomination.

17. Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last & Only Hope* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), p. 66.

18. James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, vol. 4, (Hannibal, Missouri: Hannihal Books, 1989), p. 2.

19. The SBC has a congregational polity which allows for local congregations to ordain persons for ministry even though they may not be sanctioned by the denomination. In 1973 there were 175 ordained women. By 1994 that number had grown to around 600, the vast majority of whom fill positions that would harmonize with the stance set forth in this book: chaplains, associate pastors, and workers in missions, social work, and counseling. Only 23 women serve as head pastors of congregations, out of the denomination's more than 33,000 head pastors, according to an Associated Press report (Birmingham, Alabama, *Birmingham News*, Nov. 15, 1993).

20. Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last & Only Hope*, p. x.

21. Information supplied by Mark T. Coppenger, Vice President for Convention Relations, at the offices of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn.

Chapter Ten

ADVENTISM AT A CROSSROADS

What does the stir over ordination for women mean for the future of Adventism? Can it change the way we read the Bible, and even change who we are?

Spotlight Focused

"Evangelicals today are facing a watershed concerning the nature of biblical inspiration and authority." So warned Francis Schaeffer in his final book, the capstone of his life's work.[1] The contemporary struggles seen in such great Protestant denominations as the Anglican-Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church of Sweden, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Southern Baptist Church, provide vivid examples of the relevance of Schaeffer's warning. For decades these churches have been embroiled in controversy concerning the authority and interpretation of the Bible. The ordination of women issue, though of secondary importance, has featured conspicuously in that controversy.

The campaign to ordain women ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist church, culminating in the decision of the 1990 Indianapolis Session of the General Conference not to do so, has focused the spotlight for Adventists on biblical authority and interpretation.

Why have proponents and opponents, who read and study the same Bible, come to completely opposite conclusions? The debate has revealed an obvious divergence in arguments, involving full or limited authority of the Bible. In this respect, "Seventh-day Adventist theology and doctrine are at a crossroads over the role of women question."[2]

Serious Implications

The terms "watershed" and "crossroads" are appropriate, because in order for the Seventh-day Adventist church to ordain women in ministry, a departure from *full* biblical authority would be necessary. Such a departure would have serious implications for the future of Adventism. Once it is done, once the kind of interpretation allowing for women's ordination is accepted, the Adventist church will have embarked upon a path from which it may never recover.

No matter how close they may appear at first, feminist interpretation and Adventist interpretation are on divergent courses. Every road has a destination. The wise traveler inquires where the road leads before deciding to take it. Seventh-day Adventists should heed Mary A. Kassian's warning to evangelical Christianity:

> Feminism is, to the evangelical Church, a watershed issue. In order to introduce feminist concepts into Christianity, basic beliefs regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture need to be adjusted. Evangelical Christians who accept feminist precepts may appear very close in doctrine and theology to those who do not, but the process of time will see them end at a destination far from Evangelicalism. Just like the snow that lies side by side, these two current philosophies of Evangelicalism will melt and flow into separate valleys, rivers, and finally into distant oceans, thousands of miles apart.[3]

The ordination issue is not a peripheral matter that can be resolved regionally. By affecting principles of Bible interpretation, it can be expected to impact other fundamental doctrines of Adventism, and it would strongly influence how the church responds to other issues that may appear on the horizon. Thus the Seventh-day Adventist church may very well be facing one of the most critical periods in its history.

As painful as it may be, perhaps we should be grateful that the women's ordination question has served to call our attention to the foundational issues of biblical authority and interpretation. How the ordination question is finally settled will have a major influence

on the direction the Seventh-day Adventist church takes in the years ahead relative to theology, doctrine, ethics, mission, and lifestyle. It will have serious implications for preaching and evangelism, as well as for theological education and ministerial training.

The issue of the ordination of women is not just socio-cultural. If it were, the battle would consist of determining which part of the world church has enough votes to impose its views on another. But in fact it is a biblical-theological issue which cannot be resolved by simply agreeing to recognize cultural diversity. The Bible *does* have a great deal to say about it. We cannot draw lines through portions of the Bible with which we do not agree and thus figuratively excise them. The Pauline passages discussed in chapter eight cannot be ignored or be dismissed as culturally conditioned. So far, no persuasive arguments have been forthcoming, on the basis of which those passages can be ignored or discounted. The passages must be taken as literally as proponents of women's ordination insist that Galatians 3:28 be taken. They are not "problematic" texts, nor do they contain such "difficulties" that the student can simply brush them aside. A theological solution to the issue at hand must rest firmly on biblical studies in which all the biblical principles which apply are taken into account.

Dare to Stand Alone

The question is: Are we interested in ascertaining truth? That discovery, which requires a consideration of all relevant biblical data, may also require the abandonment of prejudices, biases, or preconceived assumptions.

All Adventists should regard the thesis of male and female equality as irrefutable and undebatable (Gal. 3:28). But opponents of the ordination of women in ministry also insist that all relevant biblical data (such as 1 Timothy 3:2) be taken into account in formulating an Adventist position on the issue. To ignore such material is not serious biblical research but propaganda in the service of a social agenda.

If the Seventh-day Adventist church does not "dare to be a Daniel" and "dare to stand alone" if necessary, the Scriptural basis for claiming its own remnant purity will be jeopardized.

A Glorious Hope

This portrayal would be bleak and depressing for the future of Adventism if this were all there is to the story. What has happened, and is happening, to other Christian denominations does not have to happen to the Seventh-day Adventist church. There is hope and it is most glorious!

This book opened with Mrs. White's dream of a ship facing an iceberg. The Captain gave the command, "Meet it!" Though it involved a fearful shock, this was the only course that would ensure the ship's survival. So today, the ship, which is the church, may tremble "from stem to stern" as she takes on the iceberg, but she will emerge victorious and undamaged from the encounter, provided that the "crew" remain faithful to the full authority of the Word of God and face the danger courageously. There can be no sidestepping so fundamental an issue. We must *meet it!*

The promise is that "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms."[4] Also, "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains . . . . None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true."[5]

The church will *not* fall; it will remain true to the Word of God! But that will not happen without the "word of their testimony"—the faithful witness of God's people, in word and action, to the Bible as the only standard of doctrine and basis of reform. The very struggle for biblical faith makes the church strong: "The remnant that purify their souls by obeying the truth gather strength from the trying process."[6]

The glorious future God has promised is not automatic. The great controversy that has raged between God and Satan, between good and evil, dramatically illustrates this truth. The promised ultimate success of the Adventist message and mission requires the daily vigilance and involvement of every Seventh-day Adventist in every part of the world. The reality of the great controversy has placed on every member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, its administrators, medical personnel, pastors, teachers, and scholars, the two-fold duty of evangelizing the world while at the same time

protecting and remaining committed to the full authority of the Bible. These two vital duties are interrelated.

Regarding the issue of women's ordination, strong opinions are held on Bible passages and their interpretation. This simply means that a substantial degree of divergence yet remains. However, we can be confident of this: if the Seventh-day Adventist church will continue to pray and study the question in faith, it will eventually arrive at a biblical solution, one that will both recognize the divine call of women to their God-given ministry and preserve the full authority of the Bible. As Eta Linnemann has said, "Where Bible teachers who take God's Word literally in dependence on the Holy Spirit share what they have gleaned, the unity in spirit and agreement in teaching is continually evident—regardless of confession, continent, and time period."[7]

It goes without saying that the solution will require a major adjustment in ministerial training, through college and seminary, to provide specialized instruction in ministries to which God is calling women and for which they are uniquely gifted. Women professors will have to be sought, with expertise in the ministries for which women are most qualified. Another major adjustment will also be required—an adjustment in thinking, away from feminist concerns about supposed rights and grievances and toward a thoroughly biblical concern for service and faithfulness. There are plenty of changes required all around, for all concerned, but we are not left alone to find our way. As we seek His guidance, the Holy Spirit will give wisdom to find the needed solutions and grace for the needed changes of heart.

What joy, and what power, will come when, faithful to the Word of God, we stand in the places God has assigned us, ready to work together cooperatively in love, that His name may be glorified! Ellen White told us what it was like at Pentecost: "Notice that it was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. They were of one accord. All differences had been put away."[8] God's work will not close with less power than when it began.[9] The conditions for receiving that power have not changed. Will we determine to meet them?

God longs for the end of sin and strife. He longs to bring to earth the New Jerusalem. Then will come the time in which "no longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Rev. 22:3).

What a destiny for God's church to prepare for now! Obeying God's Word, we can work together in harmony now, even as we long with God for the time when

> The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.[10]

> The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." (Rev. 22:6-7)

NOTES

1. Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 44.
2. Gerhard F. Hasel, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation," *Adventists Affirm* 3/2 (Fall 1989), p. 22.
3. Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: the Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 224.
4. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 595.
5. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 380.
6. Ibid. See also "Loyalty" by Laurel Damsteegt in *Adventists Affirm* 3/2 (Fall 1989), pp. 44-48.
7. Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 87.
8. *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, Id.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 8:20.
9. *The Great Controversy*, p. 611.
10. Ibid., p. 678.

Appendix A

THE DANVERS STATEMENT

In January 1987, a group of Christians met in Dallas, Texas, drawn together by mutual concerns regarding the growing confusion about the Biblical perspective of manhood and womanhood. They organized the "Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood" and at a subsequent meeting in December 1987, at Danvers, Massachusetts, "The Danvers Statement" summarizing their convictions was finalized. Forty six prominent evangelicals, theologians, Bible scholars, and laymen publicly endorsed the Statement. They have extended an open invitation to all who agree with this statement to join them in the task of promoting a better understanding of manhood and womanhood as taught in Scripture.

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THE DANVERS STATEMENT

Rationale

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. The tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;

3. The increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;

4. The widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;

5. The growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;

6. The upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;

7. The emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of faithful Biblical witness;

8. The increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;

9. The consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;

10. And behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

Purposes

Recognizing our own abiding sinfulness and fallibility, and acknowledging the genuine evangelical standing of many who do not agree with all of our convictions, nevertheless, moved by the preceding observations and by the hope that the noble Biblical vision of sexual complementarity may yet win the mind and heart of Christ's church, we engage to pursue the following purposes:

1. To study and set forth the Biblical view of the relationship between men and women, especially in the home and in the church.

2. To promote the publication of scholarly and popular materials representing this view.

3. To encourage the confidence of lay people to study and understand for themselves the teaching of Scripture, especially on the relationship between men and women.

4. To encourage the considered and sensitive application of this Biblical view in the appropriate spheres of life.

5. And thereby

—to bring healing to persons and relationships injured by an inadequate grasp of God's will concerning manhood and womanhood,

—to help both men and women realize their full ministry potential through a true understanding and practice of their God-given roles,

—and to promote the spread of the gospel among all peoples by fostering a Biblical wholeness in relationships that will attract a fractured world.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood.

2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart.

3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin.

4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women.

—In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

—In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines

women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women. Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community.

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.

—In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership.

—In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.

7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission—domestic, religious, or civil—ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin.

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries. Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world.

10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and in the culture at large.

Appendix B

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY COMMITTEE (GCC-A)—REPORT

As published in the Adventist Review
January 22, 1987

Voted, To approve the Methods of Bible Study Committee (GCC-A) report, which reads as follows:

Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods

1. *Preamble*

This statement is addressed to all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the purpose of providing guidelines on how to study the Bible, both the trained biblical scholar and others.

Seventh-day Adventists recognize and appreciate the contributions of those biblical scholars throughout history who have developed useful and reliable methods of Bible study consistent with the claims and teachings of Scripture. Adventists are committed to the acceptance of biblical truth and are willing to follow it, using all methods of interpretation consistent with what Scripture says of itself. These are outlined in the presuppositions detailed below.

In recent decades the most prominent method in biblical studies has been known as the historical-critical method. Scholars who use this method, as classically formulated, operate on the basis of presuppositions which, prior to studying the biblical text, reject the reliability of accounts of miracles and other supernatural events narrated in the Bible. Even a modified use of this method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method deemphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.

By contrast to the historical-critical method and presuppositions, we believe it to be helpful to set forth the principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures themselves, that preserve their unity, and are based upon the premise that the Bible is the word of God. Such an approach will lead us into a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.

2. *Presuppositions Arising From the Claims of Scripture*

a. Origin

1) The Bible is the word of God and is the primary and authoritative means by which He reveals Himself to human beings.

2) The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words. Therefore the Scriptures are an indivisible union of human and divine elements, neither of which should be emphasized to the neglect of the other (2 Peter 1:21; cf. *The Great Controversy*, pp. v, vi).

3) All Scripture is inspired by God and came through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, it did not come in a continuous chain of unbroken revelations. As the Holy Spirit communicated truth to the Bible writer, each wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the aspect of the truth which he was led to stress. For this reason the student of the Bible will gain a rounded comprehension on any subject by recognizing that the Bible is its own best interpreter and when studied as a whole it depicts a consistent, harmonious truth (2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1, 2; cf. *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 19, 20; *The Great Controversy*, pp. v, vi).

4) Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural back-

grounds to serve as God's word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.

b. Authority

1) The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible revelation of God's will and His salvation. The Bible is the word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12).

2) Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history and God's acts in history. It provides the normative theological interpretation of those acts. The supernatural acts revealed in Scripture are historically true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of historical events.

3) The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human. Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history. While at times there may be parallel procedures employed by Bible students to determine historical data, the usual techniques of historical research, based as they are on human presuppositions and focused on the human element, are inadequate for interpreting the Scriptures, which are a blend of the divine and the human. Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of Scripture can avoid a distortion of its message.

4) Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it. Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them (1 Cor. 2:1-6). God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent, but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.

5) The revelation of God in all nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the Written Word, and it is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

3. *Principles for Approaching the Interpretation of Scripture*

a. The Spirit enables the believer to accept, understand, and apply the Bible to one's own life as he[/she] seeks divine power to render

obedience to all scriptural requirements and to appropriate personally all Bible promises. Only those following the light already received can hope to receive further illumination of the Spirit (John 16:13, 14; 1 Cor. 2:10-14).

b. Scripture cannot be correctly interpreted without the aid of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enables the believer to understand and apply Scripture. Therefore, any study of the Word should commence with a request for the Spirit's guidance and illumination.

c. Those who come to the study of the Word must do so with faith, in the humble spirit of a learner who seeks to hear what the Bible is saying. They must be willing to submit all presuppositions, opinions and the conclusions of reason to the judgment and correction of the Word itself. With this attitude the Bible student may come directly to the Word, and with careful study may come to an understanding of the essentials of salvation apart from any human explanations, however helpful. The biblical message becomes meaningful to such a person.

d. The investigation of Scripture must be characterized by a sincere desire to discover and obey God's will and word rather than to seek support or evidence for preconceived ideas.

4. *Methods of Bible Study*

a. Select a Bible version for study that is faithful to the meaning contained in languages in which the Bible originally was written, giving preference to translations done by a broad group of scholars and published by a general publisher above translations sponsored by a particular denomination or narrowly focused group.

Exercise care not to build major doctrinal points on one Bible translation or version. Trained biblical scholars will use the Greek and Hebrew texts, enabling them to examine variant readings of ancient Bible manuscripts, as well.

b. Choose a definite plan of study, avoiding haphazard and aimless approaches. Study plans such as the following are suggested:

1) Book-by-book analysis of the message.

2) Verse-by-verse method.

3) Study that seeks a biblical solution to a specific life-problem, biblical satisfaction for a specific need, or a biblical answer to a specific question.

4) Topical study (faith, love, Second Coming, and others).

5) Word study.

6) Biographical study.

c. Seek to grasp the simple, most obvious meaning of the biblical passage being studied.

d. Seek to discover the underlying major themes of Scripture as found in individual texts, passages, and books. Two basic, related themes run throughout Scripture: (1) the person and work of Jesus Christ; and (2) the great controversy perspective involving the authority of God's Word, the Fall of man, the first and second advents of Christ, the exoneration of God and His law, and the restoration of the divine plan for the universe. These themes are to be drawn from the totality of Scripture and not imposed on it.

e. Recognize that the Bible is its own interpreter and that the meaning of words, texts, and passages is best determined by diligently comparing scripture with scripture.

f. Study the context of the passage under consideration by relating it to the sentences and paragraphs immediately preceding and following it. Try to relate the ideas of the passage to the line of thought of the entire biblical book.

g. As far as possible ascertain the historical circumstances in which the passage was written by the biblical writer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

h. Determine the literary type the author is using. Some biblical material is composed of parables, proverbs, allegories, psalms, and apocalyptic prophecies. Since many biblical writers presented much of their material as poetry, it is helpful to use a version of the Bible that presents this material in poetic style, for passages employing imagery are not to be interpreted in the same manner as prose.

i. Recognize that a given biblical text may not conform in every detail to present-day literary categories. Be cautious not to force these categories in interpreting the meaning of the biblical text. It is a human tendency to find what one is looking for, even when the author [writer] did not intend such.

j. Take note of grammar and sentence construction in order to discover the author's [writer's] meaning. Study the key words of the passage by comparing their use in other parts of the Bible by means of

a concordance and with the help of biblical lexicons and dictionaries.

k. In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. Archaeology, anthropology, and history may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.

l. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given biblical passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, p. 256; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 193, 595; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707, 708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 33-35).

m. After studying as outlined above, turn to various commentaries and secondary helps such as scholarly works to see how others have dealt with the passage. Then carefully evaluate the different viewpoints expressed from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.

n. In interpreting prophecy keep in mind that:

1) The Bible claims God's power to predict the future (Isa. 46:10).

2) Prophecy has a moral purpose. It was not written merely to satisfy curiosity about the future. Some of the purposes of prophecy are to strengthen faith (John 14:29) and to promote holy living and readiness for the Advent (Matt. 24:44; Rev. 22:7, 10, 11).

3) The focus of much prophecy is on Christ (both His first and second advents), the church, and the end-time.

4) The norms for interpreting prophecy are found within the Bible itself: The Bible notes time prophecies and their historical fulfillments, the New Testament cites specific fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, and the Old Testament itself presents individuals and events as types of the Messiah.

5) In the New Testament application of Old Testament prophecies, some literal names become spiritual: e.g., Israel represents the church; Babylon, apostate religion; etc.

6) There are two general types of prophetic writings: nonapocalyptic prophecy, as found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and apocalyptic prophecy, as found in Daniel and the Revelation. These differing types have different characteristics:

a) Nonapocalyptic prophecy addresses God's people; apocalyptic prophecy is more universal in scope.

b) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often is conditional in nature, setting

forth to God's people the alternatives of blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience; apocalyptic emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His control over history.

c) Nonapocalyptic prophecy often leaps from the local crisis to the end-time day of the Lord; apocalyptic prophecy presents the course of history from the time of the prophet to the end of the world.

d) Time prophecies in nonapocalyptic prophecy generally are long, e.g., 400 years of Israel's servitude (Gen. 15:13) and 70 years of Babylonian captivity (Jer. 25:12). Time prophecies in apocalyptic prophecy generally are phrased in short terms, e.g., 10 days (Rev. 2:10) or 42 months (Rev. 13:5). Apocalyptic time periods stand symbolically for longer periods of actual time.

7) Apocalyptic prophecy is highly symbolic and should be interpreted accordingly. In interpreting symbols, the following methods may be used:

a) Look for interpretations (explicit or implicit) within the passage itself (e.g., Dan. 8:20, 21; Rev. 1:20).

b) Look for interpretations elsewhere in the book or in other writings by the same author [writer].

c) Using a concordance, study the use of symbols in other parts of Scripture.

d) A study of ancient Near Eastern documents may throw light on the meaning of symbols, although scriptural use may alter those meanings.

8) The literary structure of a book often is an aid to interpreting it. The parallel nature of Daniel's prophecies is an example.

o. Parallel accounts in Scripture sometimes present differences in detail and emphasis (for example, compare Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18, or 2 Kings 18-20 with 2 Chron. 32). When studying such passages, first examine them carefully to be sure that the parallels actually are referring to the same historical event. For example, many of Jesus' parables may have been given on different occasions to different audiences and with different wording.

In cases where there appear to be differences in parallel accounts, one should recognize that the total message of the Bible is the synthesis of all its parts. Each book or writer communicates that which the Spirit has led him to write. Each makes his own special contribution

to the richness, diversity, and variety of Scripture (*The Great Controversy*, pp. v, vi). The reader must allow each Bible writer to emerge and be heard, while at the same time recognizing the basic unity of the divine self-disclosure.

When parallel passages seem to indicate discrepancy or contradiction, look for the underlying harmony. Keep in mind that dissimilarities may be due to minor errors of copyists (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 16), or may be the result of differing emphases and choice of materials of various authors [writers] who wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for different audiences under different circumstances (*ibid.*, pp. 21, 22; *The Great Controversy*, p. vi).

It may prove impossible to reconcile minor dissimilarities in detail which may be irrelevant to the main and clear message of the passage. In some cases judgment may have to be suspended until more informa-tion and better evidence are available to resolve a seeming discrepancy.

p. The Scriptures were written for the practical purpose of revealing the will of God to the human family. However, in order for one not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns.

Expressions such as "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Ex. 9:12) or "an evil spirit from God" (1 Sam. 16:15), the imprecatory psalms, and the "three days and three nights" of Jonah as compared with Christ's death (Matt. 12:40) commonly are misunderstood because they are interpreted today from a different viewpoint.

A background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is indispensable for understanding such expressions. For example, Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, e.g., the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

Another aspect of Scripture that troubles the modern mind is the divine command to Israel to engage in war and execute entire nations. Israel originally was organized as a theocracy, a civil government through which God ruled directly. Such a theocratic state was unique.

It no longer exists and cannot be regarded as a direct model for Christian practice.

The Scriptures record experiences and statements of persons whom God accepted but were not in harmony with the spiritual principles of the Bible as a whole—for example, incidents relating to the use of alcohol, to polygamy, divorce, and slavery. Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted and bore with in the lives of the patriarchs and in Israel. Jesus made this clear in His statement with regard to divorce (Matt. 19:4-6, 8).

The spirit of the Scriptures is one of restoration. God works patiently to elevate fallen humanity from the depths of sin to the divine ideal. Consequently we must not accept as models the actions of sinful men as recorded in the Bible.

The Scriptures represent the unfolding of God's revelation to man. Jesus' sermon on the mount, for example, enlarges and expands on certain Old Testament concepts. Christ Himself is the ultimate revelation of God's character to humanity (Heb. 1:1-3).

While there is an overarching unity in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and while all Scripture is equally inspired, God chose to reveal Himself to and through human individuals and to meet them where they were in terms of spiritual and intellectual endowments. God Himself does not change, but He progressively unfolded His revelation to men as they were able to grasp it (John 16:12; *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 945; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21). Every experience or statement of Scripture is a divinely inspired record, but not every statement or experience is necessarily normative for Christian behavior today. Both the spirit and the letter of Scripture must be understood (1 Cor. 10:6-13; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 150; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 10-12).

q. As the final goal, make application of the text. Ask such questions as "What is the message and purpose God intends to convey through Scripture? What meaning does this text have for me? How does it apply to my situation and circumstances today? In doing so, recognize that although many biblical passages had local significance, nonetheless they contain timeless principles applicable to every age and culture.

5. *Conclusion*

In the Introduction to *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White wrote:

"The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' John 1:14" (p. vi).

As it is impossible for those who do not accept Christ's divinity to understand the purpose of His incarnation, it is also impossible for those who see the Bible merely as a human book to understand its message, however careful and rigorous their methods.

Even Christian scholars who accept the divine-human nature of Scripture but whose methodological approaches cause them to dwell largely on its human aspects risk emptying the biblical message of its power by relegating it to the background while concentrating on the medium. They forget that medium and message are inseparable and that the medium without the message is as an empty shell that cannot address the vital spiritual needs of humankind.

A committed Christian will use only those methods that are able to do full justice to the dual, inseparable nature of Scripture, enhance his[/her] ability to understand and apply its message, and strengthen faith.